



Title of report: Domestic Abuse Commissioning - 2026

Decision maker: Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing

Decision date: 11 August 2026

Report by: Wendy Dyer Commissioning Manager

Corporate Director - Community Wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To seek approval to recommission Domestic Abuse Support Services in Herefordshire through a competitive procurement process, delivering a sustainable, integrated system of accommodation and support that meets statutory duties and improves outcomes for victims and their children.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) the commissioning of Domestic Abuse support services be approved through an open procurement process using a lot-based structure (Lot 1: Safe Accommodation Service and Lot 2: Whole-family community-based support, safe accommodation and housing advocacy), for an initial period of up to 24 months commencing on 1 April 2027 and ending on 31 March 2029, with an estimated maximum cost of £1.23m across the initial contract period. Provision of an optional 48 month (4 year) extension is also provided taking the full contract value to a potential £5.33m. (Note this is the scope of the council commissioned spend however attention is drawn to point 26 below as eligible providers will be able to draw down additional funding as part of the service delivery);
- b) authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing to award the contracts for Domestic Abuse services following completion of the procurement process; approve changes to the commissioning process; manage the contracts once awarded, including varying or terminating them subject to performance, funding availability and compliance with Contract Procedure Rules; and approve any contract extensions provided for within the contracts, for a cumulative period of up to 48 months (four years) beyond the initial term, with an estimated extension value of up to £4.1 million, subject to available funding;

Alternative options

1. **Do not commission support services for victims of domestic abuse.** This option is not recommended, as it would place the Council in breach of its statutory responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Part 4 of the Act requires councils to ensure the availability of support for victims and their children within safe accommodation, with dedicated government grant funding provided for this purpose.
2. **Commission a single domestic abuse support service.** This option is not recommended. Splitting the procurement into two Lots supports competition, encourages partnership and consortium approaches, and enables providers to bid for the areas where they can demonstrate the strongest expertise and value for money. It also provides the Council with greater flexibility to manage different service elements, funding requirements and future demand.
3. **To deliver the domestic abuse service within the council.** This option is not recommended. Providing services for domestic abuse victim-survivors safely requires specialist knowledge and expertise. At present, the council does not have existing expertise or capacity to deliver the services in-house.

Key considerations

4. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places statutory duties on local authorities to assess need, establish and maintain a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, publish a Domestic Abuse Strategy, and ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access appropriate support within safe accommodation. Children are recognised in law as victims in their own right and must be reflected as such within service design and delivery.
5. Domestic abuse services in Herefordshire are currently funded through a combination of the Public Health Ringfenced Grant (PHRG), the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Safe Accommodation Grant, and residual underspend from new burdens funding. These funding streams currently support:

- a. Refuge, extended refuge and domestic abuse support services delivered by West Mercia Women's Aid
 - b. Safe accommodation and floating support delivered by Stonewater Ltd
 - c. Floating support for men and boys delivered by Cranstoun
- 6. While the current model provides a strong foundation of specialist provision, including skilled providers and established partnership working, elements of delivery have been supported through time-limited funding. As this underspend comes to an end, there is a requirement to realign services to confirmed, ongoing funding streams.
- 7. The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) initially provided new burdens funding to support councils in delivering the full range of duties introduced under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. More recently MHCLG grant funding is now specifically restricted to support delivered within safe accommodation, in line with statutory guidance.
- 8. The Public Health Grant can only be used to discharge the public health functions under Section 73B(2) of the National Health Service Act 2006 in accordance with the 2026 to 2027 Public Health Grant Determination.
- 9. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant has been confirmed for a three-year period from 1st April 2026, providing a degree of medium-term financial certainty. Year one of this funding has been used to extend existing contracts to 31 March 2027, with the remaining funding supporting the commissioning of new contracts for an initial two-year term commencing from 1st April 2027.
- 10. The Council has recently commissioned the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) to undertake an independent Supported and Specialist Housing and Accommodation Needs Assessment (SSHNA). The assessment considered a broad range of supported and specialist housing needs across Herefordshire, including domestic abuse safe accommodation. In relation to domestic abuse, the total current supply of safe accommodation in Herefordshire is 25 units. Independent analysis estimates an overall requirement of approximately 28 units at present, indicating a relatively small additional requirement. Demand is projected to increase over time, with an estimated requirement for approximately 5 additional units in total by 2034/35.
- 11. 45 households fleeing domestic abuse were placed in temporary accommodation in early 2026. The majority were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, which does not meet the definition of safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 approximately 35% of these households' included children. This is particularly significant as unsuitable accommodation can negatively impact safety, stability, education and emotional wellbeing for children. Herefordshire also has a higher proportion of out-of-area placements (42%) compared to the national average (14%), indicating pressure on local provision and pathways. Taken together, these factors create a clear requirement to redesign the delivery model to ensure:
 - a. compliance with statutory duties and funding requirements
 - b. improved system coordination and effectiveness
 - c. financial sustainability
 - d. improved outcomes for victims and their children

without this realignment, there is a risk of non-compliant funding arrangements and continued reliance on unsuitable accommodation.

- 12. Learning from Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs) and national evidence, including SafeLives, highlights the importance of whole-family approaches, strong multi-agency coordination, and improved pathways between crisis and early intervention services.

13. The current model provides a strong foundation of specialist provision, underpinned by safe accommodation, skilled providers and established partnership working. The proposed commissioning approach builds on these strengths, retaining what is working well while moving towards a more cohesive, integrated and financially sustainable system. This represents a deliberate shift from the current approach and key developments include:
 - a. transitioning from separately commissioned, gender-specific services to a more integrated model that ensures equitable access to support
 - b. strengthening the focus on prevention through expanded community-based and early intervention provision
 - c. embedding whole-family approaches, with enhanced support for children as victims in their own right
 - d. improving housing pathways to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation and support timely move-on
 - e. ensuring all activity is clearly aligned to funding requirements and statutory duties
14. The recommissioning will deliver measurable improvements, including:
 - a. reduction in the number of households in unsuitable temporary accommodation
 - b. improved access to safe accommodation within the county
 - c. increased engagement in community-based and early intervention support
 - d. improved outcomes for children as victims in their own right
15. Domestic abuse support services will be commissioned through a lot-based procurement model, designed to deliver a flexible and integrated system of accommodation and support. This approach will:
 - a. promote competition and market diversity
 - b. encourage partnership working
 - c. support innovation in service delivery
 - d. deliver best value for money
 - e. retain flexibility to respond to changing demand and funding levels
16. The proposed Lots are:
 1. Lot 1 – Safe Accommodation Service: crisis accommodation and intensive specialist support for individuals at immediate or high risk
 2. Lot 2 – Whole-family community-based support, safe accommodation and housing advocacy: a flexible offer supporting prevention, early intervention, recovery and movement through the system
17. The Lots will operate as a connected system rather than a linear pathway, ensuring individuals and families access the most appropriate support based on risk and need. Clear pathways and interface arrangements will be established to avoid duplication and ensure effective system flow.
18. While similar types of accommodation may be used across both Lots, the distinction lies in the level of risk and intensity of support provided. Lot 1 delivers crisis provision for those at immediate risk of harm, while accommodation in Lot 2 provides lower-intensity accommodation and support for those whose needs can be safely met outside of a crisis response.
19. The proposed approach directly supports delivery of Herefordshire's Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy. In particular, it contributes to key priorities relating to:
 - a. improving awareness and prevention through early intervention and community-based support
 - b. ensuring access to appropriate accommodation and support for victims and their children
 - c. strengthening multi-agency working and system coordination
 - d. improving outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse

20. Contracts will be time-limited with extension options to manage financial risk and maintain flexibility in response to future funding uncertainty, while ensuring continuity of support.

Community impact

21. Local needs assessments indicate that approximately 8,000 individuals are estimated to experience domestic abuse each year in Herefordshire, broadly consistent with national prevalence levels when adjusted for population size.
22. Over 40% of recorded offences occur in the most deprived areas of the county, highlighting the strong relationship between domestic abuse, inequality and the wider social determinants of health. These include factors such as income and poverty, housing quality, access to employment, education and training, access to healthcare and transport, and the strength of social and community networks.
23. The proposed commissioning approach will support the Council's ambition to ensure that residents are safe, healthy and able to thrive within their communities. It will strengthen access to appropriate support for victims and their children, including safe accommodation, community-based provision and clear pathways to recovery.
24. The proposal directly supports the Council's statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 by ensuring that victims and their children can access appropriate support within safe accommodation and progress towards longer-term safety and stability.
25. It also aligns with the Council Plan 2024–2028 and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, contributing to the priorities of Best Start in Life and Better Mental Health by reducing harm, improving wellbeing, and addressing inequalities associated with domestic abuse.
26. By strengthening pathways and reducing reliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation, the model will improve housing outcomes and support a more coordinated, whole-system response to individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse.

Environmental impact

27. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
28. The provision of safe accommodation within Herefordshire supports local access to services, reducing the need for individuals to be placed out of area and promoting more stable, community-based support arrangements.
29. Environmental considerations will be embedded within service specifications, requiring providers to minimise waste and reduce energy use across accommodation and service delivery. This includes the use of digital systems and remote delivery, where appropriate, to improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary travel.

Equality duty

30. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

31. Due to the scope of this decision and its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached as an appendix to this report.
32. Domestic abuse affects people across all ages and protected characteristics, including women, men, children, older people, disabled people, and individuals from marginalised communities. Evidence from the EIA highlights that:
 - a. Disabled victims and people with mental health needs face increased vulnerability and barriers to accessing support
 - b. Children are significantly impacted and require tailored, trauma-informed support as victims in their own right
 - c. Some groups, including those from minoritised communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and men and boys, may face additional barriers to disclosure and access
33. The recommissioning approach is expected to have an overall positive impact on the Council's equality duties by:
 - a. Improving access to safe, inclusive domestic abuse support across all protected characteristics
 - b. Moving towards a more integrated, gender-inclusive service model to reduce fragmentation and inequity in access
 - c. Further embedding trauma-informed, needs-led and flexible service delivery, enabling providers to respond to diverse and complex needs
 - d. Requiring providers to ensure accessibility, including reasonable adjustments, accessible communications, and culturally competent delivery
 - e. Improving engagement with underrepresented and underserved groups, including older people and those experiencing multiple disadvantage, such as homelessness, poor health or social isolation
34. Mitigation of potential risks. The EIA identifies a small number of potential risks, including:
 - a. barriers to access for some groups,
 - b. the need to ensure the distinct needs of men and boys continue to be met within an integrated model, and potential confusion arising from changes to telephone access arrangements.
35. These risks will be mitigated through the commissioning process and contract management, including:
 - a. Embedding clear equality, diversity and inclusion requirements within service specifications
 - b. Requiring providers to demonstrate how they will promote access for underserved and underrepresented groups
 - c. Ensuring services are accessible via telephone
 - d. Requiring equality monitoring and reporting to improve data on access and outcomes across protected characteristics
 - e. Ongoing contract monitoring to identify and address any emerging inequalities in access or outcomes
36. Where any negative impacts are identified following implementation, these will be reviewed and addressed through contract management and service improvement processes.

Resource implications

37. The maximum cost of the initial contract term (two years) is £1,222,975.
38. The contract will include options to extend for up to a further four years, subject to funding availability, satisfactory performance and continued demand. The maximum value of the extension period is £4.1M.

39. The Council's commissioned spend will be funded through a combination of the MHCLG Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant and the Public Health Ringfenced Grant, with each funding stream applied strictly in accordance with its statutory purpose and associated grant conditions.
40. MHCLG Safe Accommodation Grant funding has been confirmed as follows:
- a. 2027/28: £470,033
 - b. 2028/29: £472,942
41. Public Health Ringfenced Grant funding has been confirmed at £140,000 for 2027/28 and for 2028/29
42. As the proposed model includes both accommodation and support elements, the overall value of the service extends beyond the Council's commissioned support funding. Providers will be expected to support individuals to access Housing Benefit (HB) or Universal Credit Housing Element (UCHE) to cover eligible rental costs and may also claim Intensive Housing Management (IHM) costs, subject to compliance with relevant regulations and individual eligibility.
43. The Council does not underwrite provider income derived from Housing Benefit or any other external funding sources.
44. The combined value of commissioned funding and Housing Benefit-supported accommodation reflects the full system cost of delivering accommodation-based domestic abuse support.
45. The proposed commissioning approach ensures that available funding is used efficiently and in line with statutory requirements, while maximising external income streams to support delivery and improve value for money.
- 46.

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Revenue	610,033	612,942	1,222,975
TOTAL	610,033	612,942	1,222,975

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Safe Accommodation Grant	470,033	472,942	942,975
TOTAL	470,033	472,942	942,975

Revenue budget implications	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Public Health Ring Fenced Grant	140,000	140,000	280,000
TOTAL	140,000	140,000	280,000

Legal implications

47. The procurement and services and use of the funding streams must be strictly in accordance with the terms of the Safe Accommodation Grant and Public Health Ring Fenced Grant. Funding after the initial term has not been identified at this juncture but this report indicates that contractual extensions are optional presumably dependent on identification of the source of the mandatory budgetary funding.
48. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council's constitution, www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution.

Risk management

49.

Accommodation uncertainty	Flexible model using multiple safe accommodation types across Lots
Continued use of temporary accommodation	Strengthened housing advocacy and move-on pathways
Fragmentation between Lots	Clear specifications and strong contract management
Funding uncertainty beyond 2028/29	Time-limited contracts with extension options
Provider capacity risks	Market engagement and flexible delivery model
Access inequalities	Embedded equality requirements and monitoring
Failure to deliver improved outcomes and system performance	Clear outcomes framework, robust contract management and regular performance monitoring aligned to statutory reporting requirements

Consultees

50. Engagement with people with lived experience of domestic abuse has contributed to the development process. This has been undertaken through a targeted survey and an online engagement session. Opportunities for face-to-face engagement were also offered; however, interest was primarily expressed in the online format, reflecting participant preference and accessibility. While participation numbers were limited, the feedback received provided valuable and meaningful insights, which have informed the design and focus of the proposed service model.
51. A domestic abuse practitioner survey was circulated through the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to gather feedback on services in Herefordshire. This engagement captured frontline perspectives from partners including Housing, Adult and Children's Services, Public Health, West Mercia Police, and commissioned service providers. This has supported a system-wide understanding of demand, risk, and service pressures, alongside identifying

opportunities to strengthen pathways, improve coordination, and enhance outcomes for victims and their families.

52. Market engagement was undertaken in early June 2026, where providers were invited to share views on proposed delivery models, service configuration and opportunities for innovation. Feedback from engagement has informed the development of the service model and the proposed commissioning approach.

53. A Political Group Consultation (PGC) was held on 16th July 2027 to consider the proposed recommissioning of domestic abuse support services. Members received an overview of the rationale for recommissioning, findings from the refreshed Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, the proposed service model, alignment with the Herefordshire Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025–2028, and the proposed procurement and funding arrangements.

Members sought clarification on a range of matters, including support for victims to remain safely in their own homes where appropriate, accessibility of services across rural communities, accommodation provision and capacity, support for different victim groups and family circumstances, future demand for services, funding arrangements, prevention and early intervention activity, and partnership and community-based delivery. Officers responded to all questions raised during the meeting.

Following consideration of the issues discussed and the responses provided, no changes were made to the proposed recommissioning approach or recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

Tackling domestic abuse strategy for Herefordshire 2025-2028- [Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025-2028](#)

Health and Wellbeing Strategy- [Health and wellbeing in Herefordshire - Herefordshire Council](#)

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term / abbreviation	Meaning
DA	Domestic abuse.
Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Legislation that introduced statutory duties for local authorities in relation to domestic abuse, including duties relating to support in safe accommodation.
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
Safe accommodation	Accommodation that meets the definition set out in domestic abuse statutory guidance and provides victims and their children with safe, supported accommodation.
Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant	Government grant funding provided to support local authorities to meet statutory duties relating to domestic abuse support in safe accommodation.
PHRG	Public Health Ringfenced Grant.
SSHNA	Supported and Specialist Housing and Accommodation Needs Assessment.

Housing LIN	Housing Learning and Improvement Network.
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment.
Public Sector Equality Duty	The legal duty requiring public bodies to consider equality impacts when making decisions and delivering services.
Lot 1	Safe Accommodation Service, providing crisis accommodation and intensive specialist support for individuals at immediate or high risk.
Lot 2	Whole-family community-based support, safe accommodation and housing advocacy, supporting prevention, early intervention, recovery and movement through the system.
JTAI	Joint Targeted Area Inspection.
Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Element	Welfare benefits that may contribute towards eligible rental costs for individuals in accommodation.
IHM	Intensive Housing Management.
Victim-survivor	A person who has experienced domestic abuse.
Whole-family approach	An approach that considers the needs of adults and children affected by domestic abuse, including recognising children as victims in their own right.
Trauma-informed	An approach that recognises the impact of trauma and seeks to avoid re-traumatisation while supporting safety, choice and empowerment.