

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 18 October 2018
Title of report:	Recommissioning of a domestic abuse support service and an outline approach for a domestic abuse strategy for Herefordshire
Report by:	Cabinet member health and wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to:

- the strategic nature of the decision, and
- 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 and summary

To approve the approach to recommissioning of a domestic abuse support service and the outline of a new Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire.

The commissioned domestic abuse support service provided by West Mercia Women's Aid is due to conclude in March 2019. This report details the intention to commission a redesigned domestic abuse service from April 2019 and provides an outline of the revised domestic abuse strategy for Herefordshire.

A shared strategic vision and set of priorities across agencies is required to tackle the root

causes and consequences of domestic abuse, which is a complex, pan-organisational challenge. Within this, specialist services for victims and their children who seek support is vital to minimise harm and maximise positive outcomes, focussed on safety, building resilience and empowerment. A commissioned service is required which prevents the needs of victims and their children from escalating. The service will provide a single point of contact and access to experienced professionals who understand the risks and challenges faced by victims, assisting them to locate the right services and information to meet their needs.

Prevention, early intervention and co-ordination of support is key to prevent the risk and level of need from escalating and ultimately costing more to organisations across the system.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the proposed outline Joint Strategy for Domestic Abuse at appendix C be approved for the purposes of informing commissioning intentions;**
- (b) a domestic abuse support service be commissioned for a period of up to five years from 1 April 2019 at a maximum value of £1.3m; and**
- (c) the Director for Adults and Communities be authorised finalise the service specification and award contracts for domestic abuse support services within the agreed budget.**

Alternative options

1. The option not to re-commission a domestic abuse support service for Herefordshire. This option is not recommended. Victims of domestic abuse and their children require urgent specialist assistance once they seek support to reduce risk, assist them to navigate a complex system and reduce the chance of returning to the perpetrator.
2. The option not to develop an updated Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire. This option is not recommended. Domestic abuse is a challenge which cuts across many organisations, sectors and professional roles. A shared strategic approach which provides clear priorities, roles, responsibilities and pathways is therefore crucial to ensure domestic abuse can be prevented and victims receive a coherent service from the point of disclosure.
3. The option to delay re-commissioning whilst a Domestic Abuse Strategy is finalised. This is not recommended. There is no option to extend the current contract with West Mercia Women's Aid. An open tender process is required in order to comply with procurement regulations. Additionally, the domestic abuse support service specification is a 'core' offer and has limited flexibility; therefore no significant changes will be required as a result of the development of a local strategy.

Key considerations

4. The financial cost of domestic abuse in Herefordshire in 2016/17 is estimated to have been £10.8 million (national estimates of cost, Järvinen et al 2008). These include:
 - £2.3 million in physical and mental health costs
 - £1.5 million in criminal justice costs
 - £277k in social services costs

- £6.8 million in 'other' costs, including housing, civil legal costs and employment costs.

Due to under-reporting, the costs of domestic abuse are likely to be much higher.

The total figure does not include additional costs from stalking, female genital mutilation, honour based violence and forced marriage.

5. It is recognised that domestic abuse is under-reported and therefore prevalence is best captured through self-reported data. The Crime Survey for England and Wales for the year ending March 2017 estimated 1.9 million adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year, equating to a prevalence rate of approximately 6 in 100 adults. Women were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than men. On average approximately seven women and two men are killed by their current or former partner every month in England and Wales.
6. In Herefordshire 3,071 victims made disclosures to the police in the year ending March 2017 with approximately two thirds being female. However, if national, self-reported prevalence rates are applied, the number of victims of domestic violence and abuse is likely to be closer to 5,900.
7. The latest data between April 2017 and March 2018 supplied by West Mercia Women's Aid shows that the service received a total of -
 - 1,294 referrals; including self-referrals e.g. through the helpline and professional referrals such as the police, local authority, health services etc.
 - 3,877 calls made to the helpline. These can include calls from the victims themselves, family & friends, members of the public, referring agencies/organisations.
 - 887 service users.
8. 70 per cent of service users were referred on to a particular service such as group work, helpline, safety planning support, 1-2-1 support and refuge. Monitoring of the existing contract with the current domestic abuse service shows that the service is meeting the requirements of the specification. Engagement with service users shows that the service is valued and viewed as a lifeline to those victims in crisis.
9. Domestic violence and abuse can occur within any familial, partner or ex-partner relationship, at any adult age and in any culture. These factors are captured within the scope of the revised strategy. The commissioned service is provided to victims exposed to domestic abuse from current or ex partners, including their children, and will provide advice and signposting where the victim has been exposed to abuse from family members.
10. Nationally there is a drive towards a 'whole family' approach to domestic abuse, including specific work with the victim, perpetrator and any children. As this is a relatively new approach, there is not yet conclusive evidence of long-range impact. This approach is costly given its limited evidence base and therefore sits outside of the scope of commissioning which is focussed on a required core offer. There is a project aimed at the whole family approach in Herefordshire, detailed in Appendix B.
11. There are fewer known cases of male victims reporting domestic abuse than female. It is unclear whether this is because there are fewer male than female victims of domestic abuse, males are less likely to report abuse, or whether both of these may be true. Support for male victims of domestic abuse cannot simply be a replication of services to females as the needs are different and must be reflected. Locally there is one-to-one

support for male victims deemed at high risk of domestic violence and abuse in the form of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors which are funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Additionally within the scope of the re-commissioned service, there will be signposting for male victims who contact the local helpline.

12. Services funded outside of the council for male victims are detailed in Appendix B. These will continue to be promoted and funding opportunities to extend support available to male victims will be pursued. The new joint strategy will discuss the needs of and support to male victims more specifically.
13. In relation to children, the current service has a focus on safeguarding and sharing of information. While information sharing will continue, the revised service focusses on education and early intervention. Data shows that children who have adverse childhood experiences, including witnessing domestic abuse, are at increased likelihood of developing mental health illness and developing unhealthy relationships. Early intervention is key to ensure domestic abuse is not perpetuated.
14. The overall purpose of the commissioned service remains relevant to the council's approach to preventing escalation of need and is therefore unchanged. The service will reduce the risk of harm to victims of domestic abuse, offer access to emergency accommodation and provide information, advice and support which assists victims to meet their individual outcomes while focussing on empowerment and building resilience to break the cycle of abuse. The current service specification has been scrutinised, including a review of models of delivery, to see whether the newly commissioned service accords with best practice, minimises risk, maximises positive outcomes for victims of abuse and their children and offers value for money. A detailed service specification will focus on outcomes for victims and will not prescribe details of how services will be delivered. The procurement process will evaluate different models of delivery offered by providers. The key elements of the proposed commissioned service are outlined in appendix A. There are also a number of other domestic abuse services funded externally across Herefordshire which are summarised in appendix B. The commissioned service will complement this offer.

The service will be monitored on a quarterly basis against performance indicators and outcomes. Effectiveness of the service will be scrutinised through the Community Safety Partnership and the Strategic Prevention Group.

15. The new service will connect in the most effective way to other organisations, including adult and children's safeguarding and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which provides a response for those at the highest risk of harm.
16. The timetable for the proposed procurement of the commissioned service is detailed below.

October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet decision • Open procurement process commenced following call-in period
November - December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing date for submission of tenders (Anticipated 19th November) • Evaluation of bids and decision to award a contract approved
January 2019 – March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition period – transfer of the current service at the end of March, exit and communication strategies.

17. The various factors which culminate in domestic abuse in all its forms are complex and unpredictable and cannot simply be mitigated by a commissioned service. Responsibility also lies with emergency and public sector organisations to identify adults and children at risk of and experiencing domestic abuse and invoke a co-ordinated response. A revised joint domestic abuse strategy and action plan is therefore required which builds on the learning from the previous strategy, connects all organisations in shared priorities and aligns to the latest research. The strategy will be jointly developed with the emergency services, health services, probation, Herefordshire Safeguarding Adults Board, Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board, housing, the Community Safety Partnership and service providers who support victims of domestic abuse. More detail about learning from the former domestic abuse strategy for Herefordshire and an outline of the revised local strategy is provided in appendix C.
18. The national strategic vision for domestic abuse is within the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2016-2020, which acknowledges that any person can be a victim of domestic abuse but it is disproportionately skewed towards women. The revised local strategy is aligned to scope and priorities within the VAWG Strategy.
19. Engagement with key stakeholders to inform the revised joint strategy commenced in May 2018. It included service users, professionals within the current domestic abuse support service, elected members, health, social care, emergency services, probation and housing. The feedback has informed a skeleton strategy and action plan which focusses on realising the priorities across organisations. These will continue to be developed over the coming months through ongoing engagement and a further workshop. The draft strategy will be completed by December 2018 and is scheduled for consideration by Cabinet in March 2019.

Community impact

20. The council's corporate plan includes a commitment to enabling people to live safe, healthy and independent lives. Re-commissioning of an effective domestic abuse support service is therefore key to ensuring victims of domestic abuse and their children are safe, able to access good quality advice and support, and enabled to build their resilience to avoid the cycle of abuse being perpetuated.
21. It is that re-commissioning the domestic abuse service would have a positive impact upon the role of the council as 'corporate parent' to 'looked after children'. The revised service provides a new focus on early identification of children exposed to domestic abuse and interventions which reduce the impact. Care leavers may become victims or perpetrators of abuse and the strategy must take into account the responsibility of the council and partner agencies to prioritise early intervention and connect care leavers to sources of support.
22. The revised domestic abuse strategy and re-commissioned service will support the achievement of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Adults Wellbeing Plan 2017-2020 and Children and Young People's Plan 2015-2018 by:

- enabling people affected by domestic abuse to lead fulfilling lives, to be emotionally and physically healthy and to feel safe and secure through prevention, education and services which enable them to cope and manage the risks;
 - offering children and families affected by domestic abuse access to early help and the troubled families programme;
 - ensuring intelligence is shared promptly between agencies where children and their families are in need of safeguarding.
23. The commissioned service will be required to demonstrate how it will meet the needs of Herefordshire residents, including making services accessible to those who live rurally. The revised strategy will similarly consider the challenges associated with the rurality of Herefordshire.

Equality duty

24. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

25. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Domestic abuse is experienced by people across all parts of the population including those with protected characteristics.

26. Research for the commissioned service and the revised strategy includes the domestic abuse needs assessment undertaken in 2013 and subsequently updated in 2016. The assessment includes specific demographic data around victims and perpetrators of abuse in Herefordshire. Both the commissioned service and revised strategy will be required to demonstrate meeting the needs of domestic abuse victims with protected characteristics based upon the specific demography of Herefordshire, including:

- older people affected by domestic abuse. Herefordshire has an older age structure than England and Wales, with 24 per cent of the population aged 65 years or above compared to 18 per cent nationally. This is likely to be reflected in instances of domestic abuse in Herefordshire. Recent local domestic homicide reviews have included dementia as a feature.
- Herefordshire's Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population (6.4% compared to 19.5% nationally)
- Pregnant women and new mothers, who can be at increased risk due to a sense of loss of control or jealousy from current or ex partners

- same-sex couples
- advice and signposting for male victims
- disabled people, who can be at additional risk as a result of a reliance upon their partner for support

Resource implications

27. The provision of a domestic abuse service in Herefordshire from April 2019 will be delivered within the existing budget of £227k from Adults Wellbeing and £32k from Childrens Wellbeing.
28. There are no direct financial implications arising directly from the recommendations as this budget is built into the current Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Legal implications

29. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 councils have a statutory duty to work with other agencies to reduce crime and disorder in their local area. Domestic abuse constitutes a significant proportion of all recorded crime in the UK.
30. The report proposes that any commissioned service would be subject to a competitive procurement process, which would need to be compliant with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
31. Any service strategy should take account of the needs of different groups of the community in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
32. There are no other significant legal implications identified from this report.

Risk management

33. In recommissioning the domestic abuse service, the main risks are:
 - The market is unable to meet the entirety of the revised specification. **Mitigation:** Research into innovative commissioning, partnership working and models of domestic abuse services in comparative areas outside of Herefordshire will enable the council to assess what is feasible and likely to generate a response to an open procurement process. A soft market test to explore interest in delivering a service in Herefordshire, including details of the scope of the service and proposed budget, received a response from eight providers, indicating the service is deliverable within the budget.
 - Following the award of contract to a provider, the revised domestic abuse strategy identifies requirements for the domestic abuse service which fall outside of the specification. **Mitigation:** Similar research is required to inform both the new service specification and strategy. It is not envisaged that the strategy will generate any unanticipated requirements for the new service. The commissioned provider will be included within engagement activity to develop the strategy.

34. Revising the strategy relies upon a commitment from stakeholders to actively engage in its development and implementation which could be impacted by conflicting demands placed on resources. **Mitigation:** Initial engagement with stakeholders has secured a commitment to developing a strategy and implementing the priorities. A pragmatic approach has been taken to minimise demand upon resources. Oversight of implementation of the domestic abuse strategy will be overseen by the Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding Boards, including relevant sub-groups.

Consultees

35. West Mercia Women's Aid service users were invited to offer their experiences of the commissioned and wider services. Ten service users attended, offering insight including:
- the value of the commissioned service as a single place for advice and information
 - the importance of the helpline and access to refuge
 - the importance of access to a service which helps to navigate a complex system
 - wider mixed feedback about universal services and specific domestic abuse services funded outside of the council

The feedback has been used to inform stakeholder workshops, commissioning and the revised strategy.

36. An informal workshop for joint Scrutiny Committee members was completed in July 2018 to provide background into the national and local context and invite comments on the commissioned service and the approach to developing the strategy. Members generally approved the approach, offering specific comments around the importance of education for professionals and children, and creating the environment for victims to disclose abuse. The suggestions will be incorporated into the domestic abuse strategy action plan. The draft strategy will be formally considered by Adults and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee members in January 2019.
37. A stakeholder workshop including the police, probation, fire and rescue, housing, social care and health services was completed in July 2018. This informed the four draft priorities and an outline action plan. Engagement will be a continuous process to shape a draft joint strategy by December 2018.
38. Political groups have been consulted on the proposed recommissioning and strategy. A comment was received from the Herefordshire Independents supporting the value of the domestic abuse support service.
39. A soft market exercise was completed in May 2018 to test the appetite of the market to deliver a domestic abuse service in Herefordshire. Eight responses were received from a variety of organisations. However, this is not always indicative of the number of bids received and may not necessarily translate into a competitive procurement.

Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of the proposed commissioned service.

Appendix B: Summary of domestic abuse services funded outside of the Council

Appendix C: Outline of the joint Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire

Appendix D: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix E: Data Privacy Impact Assessment

Background papers

None identified.