

Report for: Cabinet – 18 January 2022

Title: Variation and Extension of Housing Related Support Contract - Domestic Abuse Service - Floating Support and Refuge Provision

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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1. This report seeks Cabinet approval to implement Contract Standing Order 10.02.1b, to vary and extend the current contract for the Domestic Abuse Refuge and Floating Support Services, provided on the Council's behalf by Solace Women's Aid.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

- 2.1 Haringey Council are committed to tackling and preventing domestic abuse and to supporting all survivors to feel safe and supported. We will do this by providing specialist support services, by holding perpetrators to account and by working with local communities to ensure all Haringey residents can live a life free from violence and abuse.
- 2.2 The new statutory duties contained in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) require a refreshed and expanded response to the supported housing and specialist floating support services available to victim-survivors of domestic abuse. We welcome the focus on prevention and on ensuring victims can access safe accommodation where needed.
- 2.3 This service is strategically important in delivering our statutory duties, but also to delivering the commitments we set out in the Borough Plan (2019-23) and the launch of our 10-year Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The extension of the current contracts will ensure that officers are able to review and refresh our housing-related support offer to survivors of domestic abuse in a planned and rigorous way whilst ensuring continued availability of support.

3. Recommendations

- Cabinet is asked:
- 3.1 To approve the variation and extension of the current contracts for domestic abuse services, held by Solace Women's Aid, as allowed under Contract Standing Order 10.02.1b as follows:

- Floating Support - from 1 April 2022 to 31 January 2023 at cost of £109,269.04.
- Refuge Provision - from 1 April 2022 to 31 January 2024 at cost of £157,860.31.

3.2 The aggregated value of the full contract period is as follows:

- Floating Support - from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2023 (2 years 6 months) will be £351,642.
- Refuge Provision – from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2024 (3 years 6 months) will be £308,206.
- Total value £659,847

3.3 Funding for this extension will be from the Council's Housing Related Support general fund budget, in Adults and Health.

3.4 A 5% contract value uplift has been negotiated with Solace Women's Aid for the duration of the variation and extension period. This has been agreed in acknowledgement of increased staff costs since contract commencement.

4. Reasons for decision

4.1 The current contract with Solace Women's Aid has 2 services:

- 1) A 60-unit floating support service which is ending on 31 March 2022 and there is currently no option to extend.
- 2) A 15-unit refuge provision which ends on 31 March 2022. There is an option to extend for one year until 31 March 2023.

4.2 It is in residents and the Council's overall interest to continue to provide these much-needed domestic abuse services in Haringey. An estimated 3 in 10 women will experience domestic abuse at some time in their lives; in Haringey over 3,000 women are currently experiencing domestic violence and over 20,000 women are living with the legacy of past abuse.

4.3 The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) places new duties on local authorities to provide 'safe accommodation' and support to victims of domestic abuse. The Council is currently developing new 'safe accommodation' in the borough to fulfil these duties. As such, an extension of the current contracts will allow the Council's Housing-Related Support Team adequate time to fulfil these duties and then to review and refresh all contracts and services needed to address domestic abuse going forward.

4.4 A contract variation and extension will give sufficient time to explore sourcing models, service delivery pathways and then, if required, to carry out a tender process for new services.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 Do nothing. This option was discounted as the Council has a statutory duty to provide safe accommodation and support to survivors of domestic abuse; refuge

provision is one of the key services that fulfil this duty and floating support is a key preventative response.

- 5.2 In-house delivery of the provision was considered and was found not to be feasible at this time; there is not currently an established approach or delivery model for this type of specialist service within the Council. This will be explored again during the contract extension period, as part of refreshing the sourcing and delivery model for domestic abuse services.
- 5.3 Consideration was given to the completion of a procurement exercise via an open tender process. However, this option was discounted because the Council is currently developing new services which will impact on strategy, commissioning, and delivery approaches from 2024. It is therefore not considered an effective use of available resources to procure a new service for such a short period of time.

6. Background information

- 6.1 The Housing-Related Support programme funds supported accommodation, floating support, health, and specialist advice services for housing vulnerable people in Haringey. There are currently over 60 contracts for a wide range of resident groups including: older people; people with mental health needs; learning and physical disabilities; young people; survivors of domestic violence; people with substance misuse issues; those at risk of re-offending and those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 6.2 Domestic violence and abuse has been identified as a key strategic priority nationally and locally. The Borough Plan (2019-2023) make a clear public commitment to ensuring a safe borough with stronger communities and partnerships where all adults and children can be healthy and achieve their potential. As part of achieving these priorities, the Council is taking action to help eradicate domestic abuse and launched a 10-year Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy in November 2016.
- 6.3 According to Haringey's Borough Command Unit, there has been a 35% increase in domestic abuse reports across the boroughs of Haringey and Enfield combined. The Met Police North Area (Enfield and Haringey) data shows a sharp increase in both non-crime domestic callouts and substantive offences.
- 6.4 Non-crime domestic callouts are incidents where the police are called, either by the victim or perpetrator or by a third party, but on police arrival, no offences are alleged or apparent and therefore it is not possible to take any further action. The total number of non-crime domestic callouts between March - September 2020 was 6926 and the average was 989 per month. This average is 11.17% higher than the average for the four months preceding lockdown (November 2019 to February 2020) and there is a clear month-on-month increase in 2020.
- 6.5 Substantive offences occur when an allegation is substantiated through evidence at the scene or victim or witness statements and the police can commence an investigation. The total number of substantive offences during this period was 4361 and the average was 623 per month. This average is 28% higher than the

average for the five months preceding lockdown (October 2019 to February 2020).

- 6.6 In the immediate period following the lockdown in March 2020, Children's Services Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) saw an increase in the severity of the contacts being made, with a much higher percentage of contacts leading to a referral and statutory service involvement. Children's Services specifically noted a significant increase in instances of domestic abuse being noted in the contacts.
- 6.7 Domestic abuse services in Haringey supports survivors, victims of domestic abuse over 16 with or without children, preventing homelessness and risk of harm, and providing advocacy and advice to enable them to sustain independent living in the community, working closely with other statutory and community services.
- 6.8 The contract with Solace Women's Aid for the provision of Domestic Abuse Services was awarded 1 August 2020 to 31 March 2022. There is an option to extend the refuge provision for one year until 31 March 2023. There is no option to extend the floating support provision. The annual contract value for both services is £224,411.
- 6.9 The contract currently consists of 15 units of refuge provision and 60 units of floating support services. Refuge accommodation is offered for periods of up to two years, but a typical stay is between 9-12 months. Haringey refuges are 100% utilised with demand outstripping supply. The floating support service offers tenancy sustainment support for people who have moved on from refuge provision and has helped to reduce the number of survivors re-presenting as homeless within the borough.
- 6.10 The current provider, Solace Women's Aid, has established close working relationships with a range of key statutory and voluntary partners in Haringey which are beneficial to survivors of abuse who require their support. The provider has the necessary expertise to carry out this area of work, with the Housing-Related Support Service within Adults and Health directorate undertaking regular contract monitoring and performance reviews to ensure that quality standards are met, the service delivers value for money and requisite outcomes are delivered for residents.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 7.1 The service directly links to **Priority 2** – *Enable all adults to live healthy, long and fulfilling lives:*
- All residents will be as healthy as possible for as long as possible.
 - Health related quality of life will improve over time (including mental health and wellbeing)
- 7.2 The service directly links to **Priority 4** - *strong families, strong networks and strong communities nurture all residents to live well and achieve their potential:*
- Strong communities where people look out for and care for one another
 - all children will be happy and healthy as they grow up, feeling safe and secure in their family, networks and communities

8. Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities)

Finance

- 8.1 The report seeks a variation and extension of contract with Solace Women's Aid for the provision of Floating Support for a period of 10 months starting 1st April 2022 to 31st January 2023, and for Refuge provision for a period of 22 months from 1st April 2022 to 31st January 2024.
- 8.2 The estimated cost of the variation and extension is £267,129.35 and will be funded from the approved General Fund budgets for the Housing Related Support service.

Procurement

- 8.3 The services which are the subject matter of this report would fall within remit of Schedule 3 of the Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015 if at threshold.
- 8.4 As the contract is sub threshold the requirements of the PCR do not apply. The contract variation and extension sought is permitted under Contract Standing Order 10.02.1b. The Provider is providing a much-needed service particularly considering the increased incidence and current profile of violence against women and girls.
- 8.5 The variation and extension will enable commissioning to put in place an appropriate strategy to meet future need and carry out a tendering process aligned to the opening of a new Council provision. As well as the Council's strategic objective outcomes including enabling all adults to live healthy lives and children to be physically and mentally well and free from harm.
- 8.6 The cost of the contract can be contained within the current budget envelope despite the increase in value it still represents good value for the Council as the contract value remained static for the last several years.
- 8.7 The Housing-Related Support Service will continue to monitor the services during the extension period to mitigate any service delivery issues, and ensure that key performance indicators and service user outcomes continue to be met

Legal

- 8.8 The Head of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) has been consulted in the preparation of this report.
- 8.9 The services are below the threshold (currently £663,540.00 for Schedule 3 services) where the rules on modification of contracts set out in Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply. The extension is therefore governed by the Council's Contract Standing Orders.
- 8.10 The Cabinet may approve the extension under Contract Standing Order 10.02.1b (contracts valued at £500,000 and above).

- 8.11 The extension of this contract is a Key Decision as the aggregate value of the contract is over £500,000. The Council must therefore comply with the governance provisions in the Constitution in respect of Key Decisions including publication in the Forward Plan (see CSO 9.07.1 (e)).
- 8.12 The Head of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) confirms that there are no legal reasons preventing the Cabinet from approving the recommendations in the report.

Equality

- 8.13 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.
- i. The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex, and sexual orientation. The first part of the duty applies to marriage and civil partnership status only.
 - ii. The proposed decision is for Cabinet to vary and extend the current contract with Solace Women's Aid for floating support and refuge provision. The services will impact women who experience or are at risk of domestic or sexual abuse and seek access to these services in Haringey. The service is aimed to support women of all backgrounds and ages above 16, among whom women from BAME groups, particular faith groups, and lower socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to be overrepresented. It also affects those at risk of homelessness, among whom women from BAME groups, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with health issues related to substance misuse are overrepresented.
 - iii. The proposed decision aims to provide support through refuge and outreach provision in pursuit of a key strategic agenda of tackling domestic abuse, recognising its prevalence in the borough and the devastating impact it has on residents, families, communities, and society at large. It is anticipated that the decision will lead to improved outcomes for women affected by issues of domestic abuse, including young women who have experienced FGM, women from BAME or certain faith groups, mothers, those experiencing poverty, and women with health issues related to substance misuse. The proposed decision therefore represents a measure to address a known inequality that disproportionately affects these groups.

- iv. As an organisation carrying out a public function on behalf of a public body, Solace Women's Aid will be obliged to have due regard for the need to achieve the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty as stated above. Appropriate contract management arrangements will be established to ensure that the delivery of the service does not result in any preventable or disproportionate inequality.
- v. The Council and Solace Women's Aid will take steps to collect demographic data on service users in order to identify any inequalities in service provision that may arise and to inform future equalities analysis.

9. Use of Appendices

None

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Press Release - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-duties-for-councils-to-provide-support-in-safe-accommodation-for-domestic-abuse-victims>

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents>

The Haringey Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy - <https://www.haringey.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/public-health/domestic-violence-and-abuse-and-violence-against-women-and-girls/violence-against-women-and-girls/haringeys-approach-violence-against-women-and-girls#vawg-strategy>