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Report of: *John Macilwraith, Executive Director of People Services*

Report to: *Councillor George Lindars-Hammond Co-operative Executive Lead Member for Health and Social Care*

Date of Decision: *29/07/21*

Subject: Extension of safe accommodation contracts for victims of domestic abuse

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:-	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	
- Affects 2 or more Wards	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Which Executive Member Portfolio does this relate to? <i>People Portfolio</i>		
Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? <i>Overview and Scrutiny Management</i>		
Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? 958		
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-		
<i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i>		

Purpose of Report:

To award contract extensions, by way of variation, to the existing contract to Sheffield Women's Aid, the current provider of refuge accommodation in Sheffield, and to IDAS the current provider of dispersed safe accommodation in Sheffield to continue to provide safe accommodation services until new services can be procured.

The key reason for the extension is to allow us time to respond to our new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act.

The extra time will ensure the provision of much needed refuge and safe accommodation for people at risk of domestic abuse continues to be in place whilst a comprehensive needs assessment takes place, recommendations are made regarding the service requirements for the next five years and a tender process is undertaken within Council's Standing Orders, to procure new safe accommodation based on the need.

Recommendations:

1. Extend, by way of variation of the current contract with Sheffield Women's Aid for a further 12 months, to 30th September 2022.
2. Extend by way of variation the Safe Zones contract for an additional 6 months to 30th September 2022.

Background Papers:

(Insert details of any background papers used in the compilation of the report.)

Lead Officer to complete:-	
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.
	Finance: Anna Beeby
	Legal: Henry Watmough-Cownie
Equalities: Ed Sexton	
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	EMT member who approved submission: John McIlwraith
3	Executive Member consulted: Councillor George Lindars-Hammond
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.
	Lead Officer Name: Ann Ellis
	Job Title: Strategic Commissioning Manager
Date: 23.07.2021	

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The Council has a contract with Sheffield Women's Aid to provide safe refuge accommodation and support for women and children at risk of domestic abuse. This contract commenced on 3rd Oct 2016 and is due to end on 2nd October 2021.
- 1.2 The Council also has a contract for a dispersed safe accommodation service, 'Safe Zones' with IDAS. This service was initially established to respond to a gap in provision for men, but which has grown in response to a growth in demand from women and families too, during the initial pandemic lockdown. This model of provision was able to react quickly to meet increases in demand such as the increased need during this pandemic. The Safe Zones contract ends on 31st March 2022 and we wish to consider the need for, and the alignment of, the procurement of both services at the same time.
- 1.3 The Council is in the process of preparing to retender refuge accommodation to replace the current contracts. It was planned to have the new contracts in place by October 2021. However, for a number of Reasons, it will not be possible to meet initial deadlines. This extension is necessary to ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations to accommodate victims of domestic abuse, and to meet its new requirements under the Domestic Abuse Act until a new service can be commissioned. More detailed reasons for the delay and need to extend the contract include:
 - 1.3.1 On 29th April 2021 the new Domestic Abuse Act became law. This legislation created new statutory duties on Local Authorities to ensure the needs of victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation are met in a consistent way. A local authority is required to meet the needs of all domestic abuse victims including those who present from outside of the locality and to provide such support as therapy, advocacy and counselling in safe accommodation, including refuges, to victims of domestic abuse and their children; local authorities are also required to report back to central government. The duty also requires local authorities to undertake a needs assessment and to produce a new strategy by 31st October 2021.
 - 1.3.2 The Council is in the process of undertaking the new needs assessment for Sheffield which will in turn inform the commissioning strategy for safe accommodation. It would therefore be remiss to develop a 5 year commissioning plan and tender the services for safe accommodation before we have the outcomes of the needs assessment.
 - 1.3.3 Sheffield has recently received £1,325,868 of new burdens funding for this current financial year 2021/22. On 23rd June 2021 the Cooperative Executive approved the allocation of this funding for this year to a

number of services / new tenders to enhance support for women and children and other victims of domestic abuse. This includes Sheffield Women's Aid, who provide the City's refuge accommodation, and IDAS who provides Safe Zones. The additional funding approved for Sheffield Women's Aid was to enable enhanced support for the rest of this financial year 2021/22. All funding will need to be extended until the end of the contracts on 30th September 2022.

- 1.4 The refuge provision consists of two good quality buildings, one was purpose built in 2014, as part of the Council's Strategy for improving supported Housing. Both buildings provide private self-contained accommodation in a mix of one, two and three bedroomed flats (including a number of wheelchair accessible flats) within a building that is secure, has staff on site and has safety features such as CCTV in communal areas and central access which is monitored. In addition, both buildings have communal training / recreational rooms, children's play rooms and safe communal gardens.

The service is trauma informed and supports women and children on site. The staff team is diverse, and the staff speak a number of languages including Urdu and Punjabi.

- 1.5 Demand for refuge accommodation is high and numbers approaching the City Council for accommodation as a result of domestic abuse, outweighs the number of refuge places available. Following the pandemic there was also a 20% increase in women approaching the Council's Homeless Service 2020 compared to 2019.

Those women and children with the highest needs for refuge accommodation are placed in the current refuge provision. In 2020/21, 70 women were accommodated and 33% of these had children. 60% of residents were from a BAMER background and 71% had some level of mental ill health.

Safe Zones accommodated an additional 25 residents/families (at any one time) Residents have included 5 men and 24 % of residents are from a BAMER background.

If the refuge provision is not extended vulnerable victims and their children could either remain with violent partners or be accommodated in far less suitable accommodation such as temporary housing or bed and breakfast accommodation without appropriate support.

- 1.6 It is recommended that the current Refuge and Safe Zones contracts are extended for 12 months, from 2nd October 2021 to 30th September 2022, and 6 months from 31st March 2022 to 30th September 2022 respectively. This will be done in line with Public Contracting Regulations and Sheffield City Council Standing Orders.

Commercial Services will undertake a procurement strategy outlining the intended contract variations and associated conditions.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

- 2.1 This proposal will reduce victimisation and risk and protect women and children (from a range of backgrounds) who are victims of domestic abuse.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1

Public consultation on citizen space is being undertaken to inform the needs assessment and future procurement of services. This is not specific to the recommendation to extend the current service. However, for this short extension, Consultation has been undertaken with Commercial services, the Executive Lead Member for Health and Social Care and the Executive Director of the People Portfolio.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

- 4.1.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken to inform this decision. No negative impacts have been assessed. The service is an interim continuation of services that is currently in place. The decision to extend will continue to have a particular positive impact on women who face additional disadvantages:

- Women suffer a high rate of domestic abuse and for whom the refuge provides safe supported accommodation,
- physical and mental health. On average 70% of women in the refuge self-report as having a disability, with 36% of this being mental ill health,
- BAME Women. Over 50% of women who use the refuge are from a BAME background, including some women with no recourse to public funds,
- The largest religious group using the refuge are Muslim though all faiths and non are supported equally

In addition, financial exclusion is a large part of the support that women need to support their independence and resilience moving forward. The services are provided by Sheffield Women's Aid, and IDAS, local voluntary sector agencies and this decision supports the VCF sector in Sheffield.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 The current cost of the refuge service including additional funding awarded to enhance the service is £524,879 per annum which equates to £43,750 per month.

The refuge contract will be awarded for 12 months from 2nd October 2021 until 30th September 2022. The total cost of this award will be £524,879. The Safe Zone contract will be extended for 6 months. The annual cost of Safe Zones is £109,930. The total cost for an additional 6 months will be £54,965.

Funding is available within the Housing Independence Budget (which includes a proportion of the funding from the government's new burdens fund for safe accommodation).

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3. The original contracts were let in line with Council Standing Orders and the processes were supported by the Council's Commercial Services. The refuge contract has previously been extended under the terms of the agreement. A recommendation is sought to vary the existing Refuge agreement in order to extend it for a further 12 months and to vary the Safe Zones agreement by 6 months, both therefore aligned and ending on 30th September 2022.

5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 None – given the timing of the Domestic Abuse Act and work required to ensure we meet the new legal duties it would not be possible to recommend an appropriate medium to long term solution and carry out the tender exercise within the time available.

6. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Explain why this is the preferred option and outline the intended outcomes.)

- 6.1 The current contract ends on 2nd October 2021 and 31st March 2022 respectively. However, the new Domestic Abuse Legislation and templates for a needs assessment and only commenced in April 2021. The needs assessment, consultation processes and development of strategic priorities will take a number of months to complete and report to Government by 31st October 2021. The procurement process itself will take 5 to 6 months to complete within requirements under the Public Contracting Regulations and Council Standing Orders.

Refuge and Safe zones provision are essential services protecting vulnerable victims of domestic abuse who are primarily women and

children. Failure to extend the service by a new short-term contract award would leave victims without safe accommodation and would put additional pressure on Social Care and Homeless services in the city.