



**Author/Lead Officer of Report: Sam Martin / Ann Ellis**

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**Report of:** *Executive Director of People Portfolio*

**Report to:** *Cooperative Executive Committee*

**Date of Decision:** *16<sup>th</sup> March 2022*

**Subject:** *Procurement of Safe Supported Accommodation for Domestic Abuse*

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:-	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
- Affects 2 or more Wards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Which Cabinet Member Portfolio does this relate to? Health and Social Care		
Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? Healthier communities and adult social care scrutiny and policy development committee.		
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? 975		
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:-		
<p><i>“The (<b>report/appendix</b>) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (<b>insert relevant paragraph number</b>) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i></p>		

**Purpose of Report:**

*(Outline the decision being sought or proposal being recommended for approval.)*

To seek approval for the recommissioning, through a procurement process, of safe, secure, supported accommodation for victims of domestic abuse.

**Recommendations:**

1. To note the Council's commitment to supporting victims of domestic and sexual abuse and tackling violence against women and girls.
2. To approve the procurement of safe, secure, supported accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children, as set out in this report.
2. Following such procurement, delegate authority where no authority exists, to the Director of Integrated Commissioning, People Service Portfolio, in consultation with the Director of Adult Health and Social Care, Director of Children Services, Director of Finance and Commercial Services and the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care to award and enter into the contract(s) to the successful bidder(s).
3. Where no existing authority exists, delegate authority to the Executive Director of People Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Commercial Services to take such steps to meet the aims and objectives of this report.

**Background Papers:**

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

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy published on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021

[Executive-Summary-Domestic-Abuse-Safe-Accommodation-Strategy-2021-2024.pdf \(sheffielddact.org.uk\)](#)

[Domestic-Abuse-Safe-Accommodation-Strategy-2021-2024-FINAL .pdf \(sheffielddact.org.uk\)](#)

[Sheffield-Safe-Accommodation-Needs-Assessment-2021-v5.pdf \(sheffielddact.org.uk\)](#)

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	<b>EMT member who approved submission:</b>	<i>John Macilwraith</i>
3	<b>Cabinet Member consulted:</b>	<i>Cllr George Lindars-Hammond</i>
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.	
	<b>Lead Officer Name:</b> <i>Sam Martin</i>	<b>Job Title:</b> <i>Head of Service ; Vulnerable People Commissioning</i>
	<b>Date:</b> 22.12.2021	

## 1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 Sheffield City Council has a strong and broad commitment to victims of domestic abuse and tackling violence against women and girls. In October 2021 the Council approved a local domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy.
- 1.2 The Council currently commissions support in a minimum of 62 units of safe secure accommodation for domestic abuse victims in Sheffield. It is proposed that services are recommissioned to allow for this to be increased to a minimum of 70 units within the first two years of the five-year contract.
- 1.3 That commissioning will be in a single lot. This lot will include the utilisation of the core refuge building which consists of 21 units that was developed in partnership with Sanctuary Housing Association as a key strategic objective of the Council.
- 1.4 In addition to the core refuge the tender will allow for innovation and a mixture of provision to accommodate people including men and, in particular, those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. This will include a mixture of additional 24 hour supported refuge provision with 24-hour concierge and other dispersed provision. All units will be self-contained, and the additional units must consist of at least one wheelchair accessible unit provided by the successful bidder. All units will have safety features such as CCTV, safe entry systems but need not be in one building. Specialist domestic abuse support will be provided to adults and children in all units of accommodation.
- 1.5 Bidders can be either a single organisation or a consortium of organisations under a lead bidder.
- 1.5.1 The contract value will be £675,000 per annum, subject to competitive tender.
- 1.5.2 **Background and context**
- 1.5.3 Refuge accommodation has been provided in the city for women and children since the 1970s. In 2014 the Council worked strategically with Sanctuary Housing to design and build a high quality modern refuge which met all the communal needs of a refuge service, and was designed to offer safety and support to, and develop the resilience of, women from all backgrounds and their children, and provided private space through the use of self-contained accommodation. Victims of domestic abuse were involved in the design of the building.
- 1.5.4 The refuge has strong security measures, 24 hour staffing on site, secure garden space for small children as well as space for older children and adults, shared large lounge, play room for young children, homework/leisure room for older children, training rooms, offices and communal laundry. All living spaces are self-contained flats with two flats being fully wheelchair accessible.  
The refuge consists of 20 flats and a self-contained emergency bedsit which is also supported by the service, providing a total of 21 units. The emergency flat is mainly for out of hour referrals but can also be used for an additional unit of supported accommodation if required.

A separate building in an alternative part of the City, including many of the same facilities as the main refuge is also currently provided by the incumbent provider. This building consists of 16 flats, plus communal facilities and office space.

1.5.5 In 2020 the Council also commissioned a new dispersed refuge service called Safe Zones. The initial intention of this service was to provide 8 units to meet gaps in refuge provision for people with or without children who are males, members of the LGBT+ community and women whose needs may be too complex for the refuge service. Thanks to the Domestic Abuse Act safe accommodation funding Safe Zones grew from its original intended 8 units to 25 units for anyone at risk of domestic abuse. The properties are self-contained, furnished properties with safety measures on site and support provided by a specialist domestic abuse visiting support service. This project provides safe and supported option for people escaping domestic abuse in the city for whom a refuge may not be desirable or appropriate and increases capacity in a more flexible and cost effective way.

## 1.6 **Domestic Abuse Act 2021.**

1.6.1 On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act was enacted and new duties were placed on Sheffield City Council with the council now required to

- *‘Assess or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for, accommodation-based support in its area,*
- *Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and*
- *Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy’*

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (England). Section 57

1.6.2 The Domestic abuse Act has a broad definition of safe accommodation in recognition of the diversity of housing in which victims/survivors and their children may live. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has, in the Domestic Abuse Act and Statutory Guidance<sup>1</sup>, defined supported accommodation to include:

- refuge accommodation;
- specialist safe accommodation;
- dispersed accommodation;
- sanctuary schemes (target hardening equipment to enable people to stay safe in their own homes)
- and move-on or second stage accommodation.

1.6.3 This proposal relates to the commissioning of specialist supported refuge and dispersed refuge accommodation.

## 1.7 **Sheffield Domestic Abuse and Support in Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment findings and Strategy**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

1.7.1 On 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021 Sheffield City Council approved the local strategy for Support in Safe Accommodation in Sheffield<sup>2</sup>. This was informed by a needs assessment<sup>3</sup> which found that there are an estimated 20,000 people aged 16 or over who experience domestic abuse each year in Sheffield:

- 15,784 women and 3,914 men
- up to 28,000 children
- around 6000 victims / survivors contact or are referred to services for support
- around 90% of those seeking support are female

## 1.7.2 **Homelessness presentations for domestic abuse**

In 2020/21 there were 692<sup>4</sup> homeless presentations in Sheffield because of domestic abuse, 83% of presentations were female. The number of presentations represented an increase of 21% overall on the 2019/20 year, a 20% increase amongst females and a 36% increase amongst males. Out of all accepted domestic abuse applications in 2020/21 18% were for males.

Regarding suitable accommodation for homeless applications because of domestic abuse, around 51% of female applicants had dependent children with them, in contrast to this around 7% of male applicants had children with them.

Of the 692 homeless presentations, data from the Housing Support Pathway (HSP) shows that 47 were allocated supported accommodation, a further 27 went to a Sheffield refuge and 188 were placed in other temporary accommodation locations across Sheffield without specialist domestic abuse support. An additional 22 people received other types of support following their application, such as visiting support.

Although the estimated prevalence of domestic abuse has been relatively static over the last few years at around 5.5% of the population being a victim in the last year, prior to the pandemic we saw homeless presentations because of domestic abuse increase in Sheffield by around 8% between 2018/19 and 2019/20. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine if this is an expected annual increase, as an average percentage increase year on year or trend over time cannot be calculated because the current collection method was implemented at the start of the 2018/19 year.

Using the ONS population estimates for the relevant years we can see that, in 2018/19 homeless presentations because of domestic abuse were 0.091% of the Sheffield population, in 2019/20 this increased (taking into account population growth between the two years) to 0.098% of the population, an increase of 0.007 percentage points. If this percentage point increase remains the same year on year, we can estimate that by 2030 0.175% of the Sheffield population may present as homeless because of domestic abuse equating to 1082 people (population estimate for 2030 is 618,261). If we suggest that the proportion presenting will remain somewhere around 0.1% this would equate to 618 presentations in 2030. The mid-point between the estimate of 1082 presentations and 618 presentations would be 850 presentations per year.

If presentations did continue to increase by 8.1% per year from 2019/20 onwards, when there were 573 presentations, this would mean that there would be around 1,350 presentations in 2030.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sheffielddact.org.uk/domestic-abuse/resources/local-strategies/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sheffielddact.org.uk/domestic-abuse/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/10/Sheffield-Safe-Accommodation-Needs-Assessment-2021-v5.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Data from the Housing Support Pathway (HSP)

As previously stated, we know that prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year has been relatively static at around 5.5% for the last few years. This would support the static estimate that 0.1% of the population will present as homeless because of domestic abuse. However, it does not consider the increase in activity we have seen locally for homeless presentations between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The estimated number of presentations per year by 2030 could therefore be somewhere between 618 and 1,350, with a mid-point of 984 presentations. It is likely that presentations under the Homeless Reduction Act will increase, and it is likely that the need and demand for safe secure supported accommodation amongst those presenting will also go up.

**1.7.3 Referrals to domestic abuse safe accommodation**

In 2019/20 66 new referrals were accepted and entered the women’s refuges<sup>5</sup>. This is in comparison to an average of 107 referrals being accepted per year between 2016/17 and 2018/19. In 2020 just 36 referrals to refuge were accepted, however these reductions are linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges faced in housing people and moving them on to other appropriate accommodation during the national and regional lockdowns. Conversely, as we estimate that the amount of homelessness presentations will be in a range somewhere between 618 and 1,350 by 2030, this indicates that in fact more rather than less units are required however due to the unusual recent situation an exact estimate is hard to make.

**1.7.5 Applications for safe supported accommodation via the Council’s Homeless service has risen in Sheffield.**

The table below shows the number of applications as a result of Domestic abuse, as a proportion of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) assessments

**1.7.6**

	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Q1 21/22</b>
Total number of HRA assessments	3511	2897	852
Total number of HRA assessments due to domestic abuse	573	694	194
Proportion of domestic abuse cases	16%	24%	23%

The next table shows the breakdown of these applicants by household type

**1.7.7**

**Applicants fleeing domestic abuse by household type**

	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Q1 21/22</b>
One Person (Female) w/ dependent children	242	306	84
One Person - Female Applicant	229	278	86
One Person - Male Applicant	71	76	13

<sup>5</sup> HSP Data

All other Households	21	23	6
Couple with dependent children	7	5	4
One Person (Male) w/ dependent children	3	6	1
	<b>573</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>194</b>

The most numerous household type applying to the Council's Homeless Service is single women with children, followed by single women without children.

1.7.8

**Applicants to Housing Solutions fleeing domestic abuse by gender (% of total domestic abuse cases)**

	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Q1 21/22</b>
Female	471 (82%)	584 (84%)	170 (88%)
Male	74 (13%)	82 (12%)	14 (7%)
Couple/all other household types	28 (5%)	28 (4%)	10 (5%)

1.7.9

**Safe Accommodation units in Sheffield**

Sheffield currently has 62 units of safe accommodation commissioned for survivors of domestic abuse. 37 of these (including the emergency room) is in refuge accommodation for women and children. 25 are in dispersed safe accommodation – the Safe Zones project. Safe Zones has increased from 11 units in May 2020 to 18 by December 2020 and to 25 during 2021.

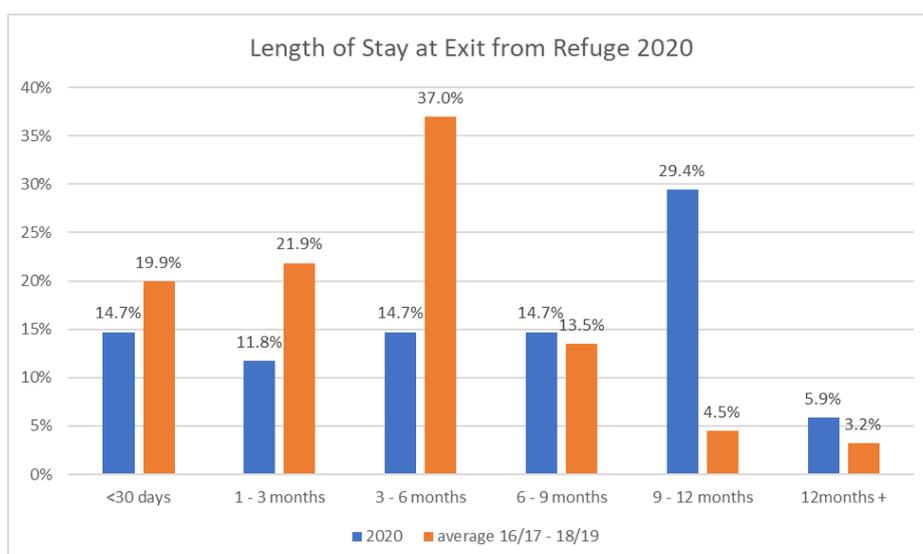
Numbers placed in safe accommodation

<b>Service</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>Q1 2021-22</b>
Sheffield Women's Aid	62	36	6
Safe Zones	N/A	34*	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>18</b>

\*service began 6/5/20

1.7.10

The average length of stay for people leaving the service during 2020 ranges from fewer than 30 days to 21 months. However, 85% of these were for people who had been at the refuge for 12 months or less, 44% stayed for between 6 and 12 months. However, prior to the pandemic 78.8% of people leaving had stayed at the refuge up to 6 months, in 2020 only 41% were for people who had resided at the refuge for 6 months or under. It is reasonable to expect that average length of stay will reduce again post-pandemic, but this current situation also needs to be considered for the immediate future.



1.7.11 Staying in a refuge leads to move on to safer accommodation in the vast majority of cases. The proportion of exit outcomes that were positive was higher in 2020 than in 2019/20 and 2018/19 and consequently the proportion of outcomes that were negative was lower in 2020 than in the two previous financial years. It should be noted however, that in 2019/20 there were 61 leavers and in 2018/19 there were 120.

- 31 households or 91% of all leavers had a positive move on outcome in 2020.
- Of the positive move on outcomes 13 or 42% became a local authority tenant with visiting support, 16% returned home, 13% became a housing association tenant with visiting support, 10% became a housing association tenant (without visiting support), and 10% moved on to another refuge.
- Of the remainder of positive exits these were spread across the following exit reasons; Living with friends, moved to supported accommodation, and now an owner/occupier.
- Negative exit reasons in 2020 were returning home to the abuser and being evicted from the refuge.

We know that 80% of refuge leavers want to locate in the same local authority as the one they came from when exiting the refuge, 20% move to a different local authority. 70% of those leaving the refuge relocated to somewhere in Sheffield. 79% move on to a permanent home but 21% leaving the refuge in 2020/21 moved on to either another women’s refuge, temporary accommodation, supported housing or a bed and breakfast. We also know that 11% of refuge leavers reconciled with their partner.

As well as outcomes related to move-on accommodation, refuge providers are supporting people to achieve a number of other outcomes. Out of the list of 70 potential needs and outcomes which are monitored, of the people who left the refuge during 20/21:

- 93% of those with economic problems were supported to maximise their incomes
- 90% of those who needed help needed help with budgeting/money management benefitted from this and improved their budget management skills
- 95% Of the people who wished to participate in activities were supported to do so

- 83% of residents had a mental health issue and 92% of them said that they had been supported to better manage their mental health
- Avoiding risk from others was another key need in the refuge. 86% of women said that they had been supported to successfully avoid risk and harm from others,

#### 1.7.12 **Safe Zones**

In 2020, 26 referrals were made to Safe Zones and 22 people were supported<sup>6</sup>- 18 females and 4 males. 16 of the 22 had children, with a total of 36 children accommodated. 50% of the males accommodated had children, 78% of the women accommodated had children.

In relation to both the refuges and the Safe Zones the majority of residents were in the 25-34 age group (two thirds).

- 67% of those who needed help with budgeting or money management, benefitted from this and improved their budget management skills
- All of those with a mental health issue said that they had been supported to better manage their mental health
- 66.67% of those leaving Safe Zones felt that their situation had improved.
- 77% said that they felt that their support networks had improved
- 50% believed that their sense of safety had improved.
- 66% of service users felt more confident about asking for help when they needed it.

#### 1.7.13 **Equality and Diversity information**

The safe accommodation services in Sheffield work with a diverse group of people<sup>7</sup>:

- Both Safe Zones and the women's refuges generally have a high level of people who are Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugees (BAMER) – around 40% in each service. 19% of people in the refuge needed an interpreter.
- 20% had an insecure immigration status including being on a spousal visa, no status, and being on a visitor's visa. 13% had no recourse to public funds
- 70-80% of people in the services state they have mental health issues – this high level is not surprising given the impact of domestic abuse on wellbeing. 4% had accessibility requirements. 16% had a physical disability and 43% had physical health needs.
- 18% had drug or alcohol support needs
- 8% were pregnant
- With regards to faith: 31% of victims at the refuges during 2020 stated they had no religion, 36% said they were Muslim, 18% were Christian.
- People from Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Trans communities (LGBT+) are under-represented in Sheffield data, however we hope this will improve as awareness about services increases and all staff referring to and those managing services improve their data collection
- 4% were at risk of trafficking
- 5% at risk of forced marriage
- 28% at risk of Honour Based Violence (HBV)
- 9% involved in sex work

<sup>6</sup> Data taken from the Oasis Case Management System

<sup>7</sup> ibid

#### 1.7.14 **Need for safe accommodation**

Whilst many victims of domestic abuse do not require to be accommodated in safe, secure supported accommodation, and have access to alternative services, in summary, the data discussed above tells us that:

- Demand for domestic abuse safe accommodation is likely to increase over the next five years
- Outcomes for people who have been supported in domestic abuse safe accommodation are good in the majority of cases
- People using safe accommodation are likely to be under 35 and have children with them.
- People are from diverse backgrounds with a wide range of needs and vulnerabilities including the need for units that are accessible to people with physical disabilities.
- However more needs to be done to continue to promote services to older people and LGBT+ people

#### 1.7.15 **Governance, contract and procurement management and safeguarding children and adults.**

A new specification has been developed to ensure the quality of the service which makes it clear that compliance to legislation and procedures will be required, not just in relation to the Domestic Abuse Act but in relation to the safeguarding of children and adults, for example The Children Act 2004, Children and Families Act 2017 and the Care Act 2014. Whole family working and partnership work are also requirements in the contract specification.

The contract management of the service is undertaken by commissioning staff who are integrated within the City's governance structure for domestic abuse. Serious incidents and safeguarding issues are managed through the Council's policies and procedures including MARAC, Domestic Homicide Review and Serious Incident Review processes, VARRM and Safeguarding adults and children procedures. Performance is reported into the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board which acts as the statutory Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board

#### 1.7.16

A new specification has been developed to ensure the quality of the service and makes it clear that there will be compliance not just to the Domestic Abuse Act but to the safeguarding of children and adults, for example The Children Act 2004, Children and Families Act 2017 and the Care Act 2014. Whole family working and partnership work are requirements in the contract specification.

The contract management of the service is undertaken by commissioning staff who are integrated within the City's governance structure for domestic abuse. Serious incidents and safeguarding issues are managed within the Council's policies and procedures including MARAC, Domestic Homicide Review process, VARRM and Safeguarding adults and children policies. Performance is reported into the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board.

### 1.7.17 Procurement Process

The procurement process and any contract awards will be undertaken in accordance with all relevant provisions of the Council's Constitution including its Contracts Standing Orders. Officers will work with legal and commercial services to agree the right approach through the Commercial Process.

Commercial Services have recommended that a competitive tender process governed by the light touch regime (LTR) be undertaken and to award one contract to a single provider or consortium. Tenderers will be evaluated on a split of quality, price and social value ensuring value for money.

It is proposed that a two stage procurement process is used to include an optional negotiated procedure enabling the Council to harness the expertise and innovation from experienced providers and leaves significant flexibility in the lifespan of the contract to vary as needs change.

The Council will mandate the real living wage in all contracts. The new contract will be evaluated on price and social value as well as quality to ensure that we are not suppressing market rates. Through the procurement process providers will be encouraged to offer added value to supplement the service, for example through specialist expertise not available to the Council or through additional resources which can be brought in to support the service delivery.

The Procurement Strategy has been developed in line with the ambitions set out in this report. An essential component of the commercial approach will be one which allows maximum flexibility, so that services can flex and respond to the changing needs of the client group, and as our understanding and evidence base develops. Our understanding of the post-Covid world is developing all the time and we need an arrangement that is responsive to this, and will seek delivery partners who are willing to take a flexible approach and can work collaboratively with us over the duration of the contract as needs change or emerge.

## 2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

The decision will contribute to the Council's One year plan primarily in relation to Communities and Neighbourhoods, ensuring safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and supporting the Education, Health and Care objective by enabling survivors of domestic abuse and their children to live the life they want to live.

## 3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1 The proposal is informed by the lived experience of survivors of domestic abuse in Sheffield and there have been a wide range of consultation activities undertaken as follows:

- Stakeholder engagement event to gather both stakeholder and provider views on the development of the safe accommodation strategy and inform the Needs Assessment
- Citizenspace public consultation held with the aim of informing the strategy and Needs Assessment
- Consultation on the draft strategy with members of the Domestic Abuse Service User Reference Group
- Individual and group consultation sessions with survivors of domestic abuse who have used safe accommodation in the city to understand their experiences and their views on the support they received. Focus groups have also taken place with all the current residents in the two refuges.
- Draft strategies were presented to the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Provider Consultation Group, Joint Commissioning Group and Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board (which carries out the functions of the statutory domestic abuse Local Partnership Board)
- Draft strategy presented to the Equality Partnership Hub meeting for feedback
- A presentation was given to the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board
- The report has been considered at People Portfolio Leadership Team

Feedback from consultation tells us that survivors of domestic abuse value the commissioned safe accommodation in the city and feel that they are currently offered good levels of support and safety from service staff, however they feel that increased wrap around support for themselves and their children would help them to recover more quickly from their experiences of abuse. The need for wrap around support for children and adults will be built into the service specifications.

## **4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

### **4.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications**

- 4.1.1 In exercising discretion, the local authority must always be mindful of their duty contained in section 149 of the equality Act 2010, that is the duty to have due regard to the need to
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited or under the Act:
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

This includes having due regard to the need to:-

- (a) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by relevant protected characteristic that are connected characteristics from the needs of the persons who do not share it.
- (b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.

Section 158 of the Equality Act 2010 permits the taking of positive action where this is a proportionate means of meeting the needs of persons who share a protected

characteristic which are different from the needs of persons who do not share that protected characteristic.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken and the findings of these suggested that the impact on all protected groups would be positive.

The decision will ensure that our safe accommodation and corresponding support is accessible to all of those who need it, irrespective of their individual circumstances and/or any protected characteristics they may have. This includes, but is not limited to, addressing the needs of victims of all sexes, all genders, all ages, all sexualities, people with physical and learning disabilities, people with mental health issues, substance misusers and people of all ethnicities and migrants.

## 4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 It is proposed that the contract will be awarded up to the value of £675,000 per year for five years with break clauses at 2 years and each year thereafter. This will be funded from the new burdens funding from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

There are some budgetary implications with this.

The Government has announced that there will be a 3-year funding settlement for the New Burdens Grant for Domestic Abuse. However, only the year one funding has been announced, it has not yet confirmed what individual Local Authorities' Settlement for year's 2 and 3 will be. Indications are that we will get the same settlement as we have had this year, but there is a possibility that it could be a lower value. If it is reduced, we would review commissioning priorities with the lead member, Directors and other council services rather than simply cut the refuge contract, because victims of domestic abuse are a priority group the council has committed to.

Whilst the settlement is expected for the next 2 years it is important for the stability of the market to award a five-year contract. Current indications are that the funding would form part of the Revenue Support Grant rather than a distinct grant after the two years. Mitigation for any potential change in resources will be the break clause each year from year 2 onwards which will enable the Council to reappraise its financial position and services procured.

## 4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1

Under the Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Council is required to produce a Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy. This formed part of an addendum to the Sheffield Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2018-2022 (both strategies will be aligned in 2023).

4.3.2

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on the Council to provide support to victims of abuse and their children living in refuges, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and second stage

accommodation. Under the duty the Council must provide support for children, counselling and therapy, housing related advice and support, communication with other health and social care providers, specialist support for victims with complex needs and/or protected characteristics, and help for victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships to prevent victimisation.

- 4.3.3 The proposals in this Report will assist the Council in meeting its statutory duties under Section 2 of The Care Act 2014 to provide or arrange for the provision of services, facilities or resources or take other steps, which it considers will contribute towards preventing or delaying the development by adults in its area of needs for care and support and reduce the needs for care and support of adults in its area.
- 4.3.4 The proposals meet obligations in both the Care Act. The Children Act and The Children and Families Act to protect and safeguard vulnerable and adults and children
- 4.3.5 The proposal will also support our duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 4.3.6 Procurement is governed by the Public Contract regulations, therefore the procurement and the contract award process will be followed subject to the Public Contract Regulations

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 Consideration was given to commissioning the safe supported accommodation in two Lots as it currently stands. However, it was felt that one larger lot would have a number of advantages including: administration costs of contract management, the increased ability for partnership working and innovation to support all victims of domestic abuse, access to a wider variety of accommodation and more flexible use of the funding to be dynamic and meet changing needs during the 5-year contract period.

5.2 Consideration has been given to not providing refuge accommodation at all and only providing dispersed accommodation. However, this goes against the Council's previous commitment to strategically commission Sanctuary Housing, at great capital cost to build a modern state of the art refuge in 2014, with the associated borrowing assumptions being on a 30-year basis. We also know that victims have differing needs and require choice of safe accommodation. Refuge blocks provide 24hour on-site support with additional facilities for children, and they engender peer support for women who have lost resilience due to their experiences. A refuge bloc provides a period of recovery, stability, safety and support for those most in need of support. The current refuge provision is always full, with a waiting list of women who want to be accommodated in this type of provision.

During recent consultation with victims in safe supported accommodation more than 50% of victims stated that they had waited for a space in a refuge to become available as they wanted this level of security.

90% of refuge residents reported that they felt safe or very safe in refuge accommodation as opposed to 50% in dispersed supported accommodation.

85% of refuge residents said they had received the right amount of support compared to 50% in dispersed accommodation.

5.3

Consideration has been given to provide the service in house. It would be very unusual for Local Authorities to run refuges internally. Specialist voluntary sector providers have developed and ran provision for over 40 years and have become experts in working with victims of domestic abuse and running safe accommodation provision. Many of them are affiliated to National Women's Aid who have developed national good practice policies and guidance. Sheffield has a strong specialist domestic abuse sector with specialist knowledge and experience. The sector is also adept at bidding for additional charitable funding to enhance services and provide innovation that the Council might not otherwise have access to.

## 6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

This decision will build on Sheffield's proud track record in responding to the need for safe supported accommodation for people affected by domestic abuse. It will ensure that we are able to meet the requirements of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It will ensure that high quality safe supported accommodation is offered that can meet need in line with recognised quality standards but in a cost effective way and the model allows for innovation and change within the contract period.