

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Report from Communities

to

Health and Wellbeing Board

on

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Options for the Procurement of Domestic Abuse Services

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report covers the procurement of Domestic Abuse (DA) Services – and options related to the recommissioning of these services.

1.2 This report seeks agreement to the following areas:

- The future procurement for the Domestic Abuse support services for the city
- What we require as necessary requirements from any service for the city

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Board approve the recommended procurement option and agree a set of requirements for the city of Southend to be included in the tender specification.

3. Background

3.1 Southend are part of the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB). In 2016 Southend commissioned their own domestic abuse support services for the local area, as well as jointly commissioning perpetrator and IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) support services. We have extended our current commissioned support services so that we are aligned with our SET partners with all contracts due to end March 2025.

3.2 This extension to our contract allowed us to partake in workshops with SETDAB who have undertaken a discovery exercise, commissioned through the external consultancy organisation TONIC, to explore the current domestic abuse landscape and opportunities for improved collaboration across the three Local Authority areas. The aims of this work

have been to design an entire system response to domestic abuse across Southend, Essex and Thurrock.

- 3.3 The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) included children as a victim group, as well as placing additional duties on local authorities in relation to accommodation for victim/survivors of domestic abuse.
- 3.4 As required under Part 4 of the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, we have undertaken a comprehensive Domestic Abuse needs assessment for the city leading to the production and sign off at Cabinet of our Domestic Abuse Strategy for which we are now coproducing an action plan. This work has been closely overseen by the Southend Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.
- 3.5 Both pieces of discovery work show that there is a high prevalence of domestic abuse across Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) with a significant increase having been seen in the last 18 months. Southend has the highest number of cases across the whole of SET.
- 3.6 The Domestic Abuse service has been included in the procurement plan for 23/24 as approved by Cabinet.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1 The current service has a Single Point of Access (Compass – run by Safe Steps) which covers the whole of SET. This service is commissioned and run by Essex County Council for the whole of SET. Provision for IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) for the High-Risk Service are also commissioned through this and managed by Essex County Council. In Southend this has been subcontracted to Safe Steps.
- 4.2 Support for safe accommodation and in the community for victim/survivors of domestic abuse is currently local authority specific and in Southend this is run by Safe Steps. This provision has been bolstered by the DLUCH funding which is specifically for accommodation-based support which is currently available as a separate fund until March 2025. Safe Steps are also responsible for the management of our Refuge, which consists of 7 beds. In addition, we have further units of dispersed accommodation at Southend Essex Homes.
- 4.3 There is also a limited offer of support for perpetrators of domestic abuse across SET with this currently being offered by The Change Project, the contract of which was procured by the PFCC. We will contribute £18,000 per annum towards this project for 2022/3 and 2023/4.
- 4.4 Southend has an inhouse MARAC function which is funded by Childrens Services, Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex as shown in the table below in 4.8, shaded light grey. This function would remain the same and will **not** be included in the commissioning exercise.
- 4.5 The DA MARAC hears high risk cases. In the year 2021-22 they received 424 referrals, 386 of which were heard at MARAC. 271 of these referrals contained children in the household. In the year 2022-23 they received 454 referrals, 414 of which were heard at MARAC. 284 of these referrals contained children in the household.

4.6 In Southend Safe Steps are currently commissioned to deliver our community support and outreach service to victim/survivors of domestic abuse. For 2022/23 Safe Steps received a total of 462 new referrals, with a further 66 referrals seeking information, advice, and guidance only. 362 of these referrals received support from Safe Steps for more than six months. Most of these victim/survivors were female, with 13 male victims/survivors.

4.7 Safe Steps are also commissioned to provide support to children and young people through “Fledglings” and “Break the Cycle.” We have greater provision for children currently than other authorities. In 2022/23 Safe Steps received a total of 151 new referrals, with 277 linked children. 31 of these referrals received support for over six months.

4.8 The current contract for Southend consists of the following funding sources:

| Council Department | Annual funding | Description |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Public Health | £25,000 | Contribution to Essex-wide pooled high risk IDVA service. |
| Communities (via Supporting People) | £255,078 | Commissioning of community support and refuge accommodation |
| Children Services | £120,863 | MARAT (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Team) including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) social worker post 2. 2 MARAT administrator posts (jointly funded with PFCC (Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner)) 3. MARAT manager post (jointly funded with PFCC and ICB (Integrated Care Board)) |
| External Source | Annual Funding | Description |
| Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) | £380,583 (variable ¹) | An annual allocation to support Local Authorities to meet our duties under the DA (Domestic Abuse) Act (2021) around support within safe accommodation only in line with the Act’s definitions. |
| Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board | £22,983 | Funding towards the Southend MARAT manager post. |
| Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex | £49,103 | Funding towards the Southend MARAT manager and 2 administrator posts. |

¹ This annual fund has been varied (although a similar amount) year on year since we started to received it in 2021/22. This is our 2023/24 allocation; our 2024/25 allocation increases slightly to £387,764.

5. Financial Envelope

5.1 We are proposing to include a **proportion** of the following three funding streams for procurement of a new service:

- Public Health - £25,000
- Communities (via Supporting People) - £255,078
- Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) - £380,583.

The proportion that we retain will continue to be used to fund existing posts within the local authority which form part of the domestic abuse processes.

6. Options for Consideration

There are four options which have been put forward by SETDAB:

6.1 Option 1 – Pool funding – joint commissioning across SET

This would include pooling **all** funding for the following services:

- SET central point of contact;
- Support in safe accommodation – Support for victims and families;
- Community based support for families;
- Community based support for victims - Adults and Children;
- Community based support for perpetrators.

Pooled funding could have the following advantages:

- There would be a consistency of offer across SET for all Essex residents;
- There would be a consistency of access to services across SET;
- Streamlined SET approach to high-risk domestic abuse;
- We would benefit from the economies of scale and cost efficiencies from procuring as SET, including better value for money;
- More interest and competition in tenders for smaller LAs in SET
- Larger and longer contracts will encourage the charitable sector;
- Collaboration with SET would allow us to benefit from innovative pilot projects such as male IDVAs to support male victims of DA;
- Convenience of a potential single contract (pending commercial approach) and performance framework;
- Convenience of a potential single contract.

Pooled funding could have the following disadvantages:

- Larger contracts may attract national providers – need to ensure local specialist providers are included;
- LAs (local authorities) may lose baseline funding and not get this back;
- Current funding for IDVAs is from core funding and grants – risks to meeting future demand without core funding.

This is the recommended option. We would retain some funding to cover existing posts within the authority but pool the remaining funds for the pooled commissioning of services.

6.2 Option 2 – Align – agree on a consistent DA offer across SET and commission separately

This would have an agreement with SET to carry out our own procurement of these services, based on the same models.

Alignment could have the following advantages:

- There would be consistency of offer across SET for all Essex residents.

Alignment could have the following disadvantages:

- Potentially limits high risk victims to stay local to SET in safe accommodation;
- Not cost effective;
- The cost of a procurement exercise for the authority;
- Missed opportunities to find economies of scale.

6.3 Option 3 – Own footprint – local offer commissioned on own footprint

This would allow us to develop a model specific to Southend and commission it independently.

Commissioning services on our own footprint could have the following advantages:

- Freedom to commission according to local need;
- Opportunity to develop bespoke support specific to Southend.

Commissioning services on our own footprint could have the following disadvantages:

- Services are not consistent across Essex;
- Costs more money to do less;
- Cost of a procurement exercise for the authority;
- We would lose the benefit of the economies of scale by procuring as a whole.

6.4 Option 4 – Partial pooling – joint commission core elements across SET with some local offer commissioned on own footprint

This would allow us to jointly commission some elements, whilst commissioning some of our own local services.

Partial pooling could have the following advantages:

- Consistency of central point of contact, SISA, perpetrators and lived experience;
- Local community and family offer developed based on local need within each LA
- Place based for community support and families;
- Current successful local service offer can continue;
- More interest and competition in tenders for smaller LAs;
- Larger and longer contracts will encourage the charitable sector;
- Consistent outcomes framework to work within;

- Local community and family offer may encourage smaller 'By and for' development;
- Provides opportunities for local providers and to diversify the market for more specialist provider.

Partial pooling could have the following disadvantages:

- Extended families living across different areas in SET may experience a different offer;
- Value for money;
- Current funding for IDVAs is from core funding and grants – risk to meeting future demand without grant funding.

7. Options for a future service to be considered.

7.1 Currently the service provided by Safe Steps has two offices and a refuge based in Southend. One of the offices is a small shop front used solely for the support of children. It should be noted that Southend leads with the support of children, other services across Essex do not have such a level of provision.

7.2 As Southend as the highest prevalence of Domestic Abuse across Essex we would like to **recommend that we continue to have a suitable office base in the city** as part of the SET contract for support services that include victim/survivors, families, and perpetrators.

7.3 The current refuge in the city has 7 rooms; we would recommend that any new contract **retains a refuge within the city with increased bed spaces as well as dispersed accommodation and an improved move on offer for victims/ survivors and their families.** We would also like the provider to explore the provision of accommodation for perpetrators so victim/ survivors can remain in their own homes.

8. Reason for Recommendation

8.1 There is a high prevalence of domestic abuse across SET with a significant increase having been seen in the last 18 months. Southend has the highest prevalence of domestic abuse across the SET. Pooled funding would benefit Southend as it would offer us the opportunity to benefit from greater resource across SET, alongside opportunities for innovation and development. As we have the highest prevalence of DA we would benefit from greater resource.

8.2 As a member of SETDAB we can influence the development of the specifications to ensure that there is provision for the residents of Southend, whether this is support for perpetrators to reduce the number of victims of domestic abuse, or support for victims during and after domestic abuse has taken place. As part of this we will insist on a local base for both victim and perpetrator services, as well as priority for Southend residents in need of a refuge space within SET.

9. Financial Implications

There is potential for some savings to the current budget of £660,661 consisting of the below three pots, however cuts to Domestic Abuse services carry risks for the victim survivors:

- Public Health - £25,000
- Communities (via Supporting People) - £255,078
- Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) - £380,583.

10. Legal Implications

We already pool some funding for Domestic Abuse with SET so there should be no legal implications, however, would set up a partnership agreement before proceeding.

11. Policy Context

This work aligns with the priority and associated outcomes in our Corporate Plan: A safe city with a good quality of life for all.

Outcomes:

- safe, inclusive communities and neighbourhoods
- people live well, age well and care well
- children and young people, including those in care, feel and are safe at home, school and in their communities.

12. Carbon Impact

Design for a service specification will consider carbon impact.

13. Equalities

An impact equality assessment has been undertaken.

14. Consultation

As a group SETDAB made a commitment to explore opportunities to rethink the design and delivery of pathways to support for victim/survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse, including jointly commissioning DA Discovery Work, resulting in the report from TONIC.

14.1 The TONIC Report identified areas of good practice, what is doing well across SET and what is valued, alongside several areas for improvement including:

- Identification of those in need
- Pathways to support
- Accessing support
- The quality of support
- Opportunities to work together to co-design the offer and strategic approach going forward.

14.2 When developing the Southend Domestic Abuse Strategy, we developed an online survey for professionals across Southend with feedback from 58 professionals who shared their experiences of working with domestic abuse. This professionals survey included exploration of the participants' knowledge and awareness of domestic abuse. We also held a workshop with stakeholders.

14.3 Victim/survivors in Southend were invited to share their needs and what they think a good service should look like through a focus group and survey with a total of 97 responses.