

Board/Committee:	Extraordinary Housing Board
Date of meeting:	25 August 2022
Title:	Procurement of a Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate
Author:	Head of Housing
Status:	For Decision

Purpose

To seek the Board's approval to waive the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules for the procurement of a Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate, who will be employed directly by Southern Domestic Abuse Service. The Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate will be working within GBC's Housing Service providing specialised support in respect of the Council's dedicated accommodation and advice service to victims of domestic abuse under the terms of a Service Level Agreement.

Recommendation

That the Board approves a direct award to the value of £49,500 to Stop Domestic Abuse to facilitate the employment of a Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate, for a two-year fixed term to undertake the duties and work detailed in the report.

1.0 Background

1.1 Local authorities have an important part to play in tackling domestic abuse, alongside partners in health, education, the police and wider services. In Hampshire, domestic abuse support services are commissioned by the Tier 1 authority, Hampshire County Council (HCC), and in 2019, Stop Domestic Abuse (SDA), a charity specialising in support services for those affected by domestic abuse, were awarded the contract to deliver Refuge and Outreach Services across Hampshire on a five year + two basis.

1.2 SDA are commissioned to run all 10 refuges across Hampshire, providing 192 bed spaces for victims, with accommodation for up to 124 children. Within the refuges, SDA provide the support around domestic abuse, in addition to specialist support for victims with mental health issues, substance misuse, and those with no recourse to public funds.

1.3 SDA also deliver the Front Door Service in the form of the advice line, which provides a single point of contact for victims, perpetrators and professionals to access domestic abuse services and advice.

There are also several community-based services provided by SDA which include specialist high-risk support, outreach, and services to children and young people.

1.4 SDA are also commissioned to provide target hardening services in the East of the County, which covers Gosport. This includes providing safety planning and security advice to victims, as well as supplying and fitting basic window and door alarms.

SDA has a strong relationship with the Blue Lamp Trust, based in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, and can refer victims into this scheme if additional security measures are required.

2.0 Report

2.1 Following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in April 2021, the government carried out a new burdens assessment to determine the additional costs that local authorities will incur as a result of this change.

2.2 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has provided £125m to cover the cost of new burdens placed on local authorities to carry out their statutory duties and functions relating to the provision of specialist support to victims and their children within domestic abuse safe accommodation, as set out in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

2.3 This funding is on the understanding that it is used for revenue expenditure relating to Part 4 of the Act on Tier 1 local authorities, and that Tier 2 authorities co-operate with Tier 1 authorities as far as is reasonably practical.

2.4 The Council, along with all other local authorities, has signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with DLUHC. The purpose of the MoU is to formalise the working relationship and expectations relating to the payment from DLUHC to councils to enable them to fulfil the functions of the new statutory duties.

While the document is not a legal or binding agreement, all parties enter into the MoU committing to honour the obligations within it.

2.5 In accordance with the terms of the MoU, it has been agreed that the Tier 1 authority, HCC, will delegate commissioning decisions to all Tier 2 authorities in the county, together with their appropriate share of the funding.

Gosport Borough Council's allocated share of this funding is £63,200 for a two year period.

2.6 The Council already has a property held in its housing stock for the purpose of providing dispersed safe accommodation for families fleeing domestic abuse, and whose circumstances are such that refuge accommodation is unsuitable.

All referrals into this accommodation are made in conjunction with the commissioned service provider, Stop Domestic Abuse.

2.7 In partnership with HCC, it has been agreed the Council's grant allocation will be used to fund a dedicated Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate to

provide dedicated intensive support and advocacy to adult victims of domestic abuse in the Council's own safe accommodation. Dedicated support will also be provided for the children and young people in the family, together with holistic family-centred support to the whole household.

- 2.8** The Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate will also be an ambassador, based within the Council's Housing Needs and Advice service, delivering bespoke training sessions for officers, and providing specialist advice and a drop-in service for the wider community.

In addition, the Advocate will link in with Domestic Abuse Champions working in other district and borough councils across Hampshire to establish a Practitioner Forum, led by HCC.

- 2.9** The Council would like to fund a post directly within Stop Domestic Abuse, as this additional resource will complement the commissioned services already in place, and will provide opportunities to access additional flexible funding opportunities directly with HCC.

Therefore, approval is required to make a direct award to Stop Domestic Abuse, waiving the requirements of the Contract Procedure Rules which otherwise confirm a competitive process should take place

3.0 Risk Assessment

- 3.1** Providing the right support for victims of domestic abuse is a priority for the Council. It is important we are able to provide dedicated, specialist support for families fleeing domestic abuse that live in the Council's own dispersed accommodation.

- 3.2** HCC has delegated authority to the Council to utilise their share of the new burdens funding to commission relevant services, and this money must be spent by March 2023

The new burdens grant will fund a full-time post on a two-year contract. Stop Domestic Abuse will support this post as a permanent role, and in the event no further funding is available beyond the two year term, they will continue to finance this post within their own organisation.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1** HCC has delegated authority to the Council to use new burdens funding to commission appropriate services to meet its statutory duties and functions relating to the provision of specialist support to victims and their children within domestic abuse safe accommodation, as set out in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

- 4.2** The Council would like to utilise the funding to commission a dedicated post, for a two-year fixed term, within Stop Domestic Abuse, to provide dedicated intensive support and advocacy to the adult victim of domestic

abuse, and their children, in the Council's own dispersed safe accommodation.

- 4.3** Stop Domestic Abuse are already commissioned by HCC to provide a range of domestic abuse services across the county, and funding this additional post will complement the provision already in place by providing a consistent approach to supporting victims and their families, as well as opportunities to access additional, flexible funding directly from HCC.
- 4.4** If further funding is not available beyond the initial two-year term, Stop Domestic Abuse has committed to financing this post on a permanent basis within its own organisation.
- 4.5** The Board is therefore asked to approve a two-year service level agreement to Stop Domestic Abuse by direct award, as detailed in the report.

Financial Services comments:	Contained within the report
Legal Services comments:	Contained within the report
Equality and Diversity:	None
Climate Change implications:	No implications; no IIA required since no procurement of material goods, or policies or services that would influence relevant behaviours, are proposed.
Crime and Disorder:	This will positively contribute towards community safety
Corporate Plan:	The Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate post will ensure services and initiatives are delivered efficiently, and will assist the council to further develop partnership working with Stop Domestic Abuse and other councils across Hampshire.
Risk Assessment:	Contained within the report
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	None
Report Author/Lead Officer:	Julie Smith