

OPEN

Children and Families Committees

15 September 2025

Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Service & Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-28

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children Services

Report Reference No: CF/27/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the committee following the review, consultation and engagement by the council of the domestic abuse safe accommodation service, and the new Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025/28.
- 2 To provide the committee with oversight of the proposed service model and to seek authorisation to follow a competitive tender process and award the successful provider the joint service contract from April 1st, 2026.
- 3 This service falls under Commitment 2 of The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 - Everyone feels safe and secure, difference is celebrated, and abuse and exploitation not tolerated.

Executive Summary

- 4 This paper follows on from the report on the 9th June 2025. [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Children and Families Committee, 09/06/2025 14:00](#) The council have completed the review, consultation and engagement and service redesign, and the next steps are to conduct a full formal tender to seek best value service for its local citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee are recommended to:

1. Approve the new service model and authorise the procurement for a new service contract for a 3-year term with a 1 + 1 year extension period, noting the feedback from consultation activity over the summer, and Rapid Review analytics conducted by S2, which advise Cheshire East Council to:
 - a) Increase the number of safe accommodation bed spaces to a minimum of 27 specialist accommodation spaces for Cheshire East.
 - b) Increase the mix of communal/ dispersed refuges, in order to reduce/eliminate the use of temporary (and unsuitable) b & b accommodation for individuals fleeing domestic abuse.
 - c) Develop the support offered to children and young people in safe accommodation
 - d) Improve communication between Housing Options and the safe accommodation provider.
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service and/or equivalent authorised officer to conduct a competitive procurement exercise and enter dialogue with the most competitive bidder if required, issue the notice of contract award once a preferred bidder is identified.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award the contract for the Safe Accommodation, in consultation with the S151 & Monitoring Officers, and with the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Children & Families Committee.
4. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services for contract and performance management, including all commercial assessments to oversee any contract extensions under the terms including contract performance and efficiency requirements and key performance indicators.
5. Approve the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025-28 for endorsement and adoption by the Cheshire East Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership.

Background

- 5 The report to committee on the 9th June 2025 outlined the background and the legal responsibilities ([\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Children and Families Committee, 09/06/2025 14:00](#))

Consultation and Engagement – Safe Accommodation

- 6 The council have consulted and engaged with victims, survivors, professionals, and stakeholders to provide the details that shape the future service offer. There has also been a comprehensive needs assessment completed which has informed the service model, please see a copy of the executive summary in Appendix 1.
- 7 The consultation and engagement highlighted themes from victims/survivors, professionals, and providers in relation to Safe Accommodation. Further details on the consultation and engagement can be found in Appendix 2.
- 8 People told us that we need to:
 - (a) Provide a mixed offer of accommodation to better meet need
 - (b) Increase the support to children and young people within the offer, recognising them as victims in their own right
 - (c) Improve and develop the pathway and increase the number of beds to reduce the time victims/survivors spend in inappropriate temporary accommodation
 - (d) Single point of access and accessible guidance and information
- 9 The Provider Market Engagement questionnaire highlighted the below responses:
 - (a) Seven of the Eight providers told us they would be interested in bidding for the contract in Cheshire East, with one being unsure at this stage and this would be mainly dependent on suitable accommodation being readily available, and funding available with the contract.
 - (b) The types of accommodation should offer choice to victims and survivors including refuge style accommodation and dispersed units in the community. Stating this is how to best meet need. One provider advocated for dispersed units only.
 - (c) Provide victims and survivors person centered, trauma informed support to ensure that their needs are met and outcomes are achieved, working in partnership with local statutory and voluntary partners in a collaborative way.
 - (d) Work to create support plans that support families to move on and achieve independence is key to delivering outcomes. Taking a whole family approach.
 - (e) Work with children as victims in their own right to ensure their needs are met with dedicated support identified.

- (f) Clear referral pathways to ensure access to accommodation and support can be strengthened.
 - (g) Challenges that providers noted include demand and capacity issues and the availability of suitable properties, sustainable funding – longer term contracts would be beneficial for providers to build a sustainable offer, recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff with the right experience for this vulnerable group.
- 10 With reference to the **Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy** a public consultation has been held between 15th June and the 25th July 2025. The consultation and engagement highlighted a number of key themes from victims/survivors, professionals, and providers in relation to the strategy, which can be found in **Appendix 2**.

The Service Model Safe Accommodation

- 11 **Appendix 4** sets out a summary of the Accommodation Model.

Procurement Timelines

- 12 The proposed procurement activity timeline is outlined below:
- (a) Publish Tender Notice – 19 September 2025
 - (b) Tender Period – 19 September 2025 to 20 October 2025
 - (c) Evaluation and Moderation Period – 20 October 2025 to 20 November 2025
 - (d) Final Award – December 2025
 - (e) New Contract Go live – 1 April 2026

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership Strategy

- 13 Following the public consultation and engagement with the Cheshire East Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership Board. The strategy is outlined below and can be found in Appendix 3, which is summarised in brief below:

14 **Strategy Vision 2025 - 2028**

“To work towards ending domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women and girls, and ensure that the people of Cheshire East can live safe, equal and harm-free lives, in homes and neighbourhoods without abuse”.

15 **Strategic Priorities 2025 – 2028**

- (a) **A focus on prevention:** Cheshire East has a culture that challenges misogyny, promotes healthy relationships, and prevents abuse before it starts.

- (b) **Trauma-informed service provision for victims, children and perpetrators:** All victims of abuse and those who harm in Cheshire East, have access to a range of safe, appropriate support options that support recovery and independence, including safe accommodation.
- (c) **Partnership and Collaboration:** Services seek to continuously improve, based on learning from those with lived experience, anyone affected by abuse and all serious incidents.
- (d) **Accountability and Learning:** Cheshire East has a coordinated, trauma-informed, and data-driven system that supports victims, holds perpetrators accountable, and prevents abuse.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 16 The model outlined for Safe Accommodation has been informed by a comprehensive needs assessment and engagement and consultation with victims / survivors, professionals and providers. The strategy for Domestic and Sexual Abuse has also been informed by a public consultation and engagement with professionals.

Other Options Considered

- 17 The best option is option two, further options have been considered; please see below.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing, do not review and / or reprocure contracts for this area.	<p>The council will not provide safe accommodation.</p> <p>The council will be at significant risk of non-compliance with its legal obligations.</p>	<p>The council risks not meeting its responsibilities to provide safe accommodation.</p> <p>Victims of DA will not have their needs met.</p> <p>Significant reputation risk to the council.</p> <p>In-housing the accommodation with support offer would involve significant staffing and cost liabilities to the LA that could not be underwritten in the current financial environment</p>
<p>Procure the Safe Accommodation service in line with the model outlined.</p> <p>Publish the refreshed DA and SA Strategy.</p>	<p>The recommission of safe accommodation will ensure an open and transparent process for the service offer required which has been informed by an independent needs assessment and victims / survivors and partners.</p> <p>The housing benefit and LA funded model will provide value for money and additional bed spaces for victims and survivors.</p> <p>The strategy will enable a clear focus towards a co-designed set of outcomes for the partnership</p>	<p>There is a risk that providers are not or cannot partner with a registered provider and therefore will be unable to deliver the required model for the funding available.</p>

	to work to reduce and eradicated DA and SV in Cheshire East.	
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 18 As set out in the report Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act) details the duties on relevant local authorities in relation to support provided to victims of domestic abuse.
- 19 The Statutory Guidance published on 1 October 2021: Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services, outlines that the Act Places duties on each relevant local authority in England to:
 - i. Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions (below).
 - ii. Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
 - iii. Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the needs assessment.
 - iv. Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / decommissioning decisions).
 - v. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
 - vi. Report back annually to central government.
- 20 S57(4) of the Act outlines the requirements for consultation in relation to a strategy under s57 of the Act.
- 21 In this instance consultation is statutory and the Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations 2021 outlines the statutory deadlines for publication of the strategy under s57 of the Act. The Domestic Abuse: statutory guidance also outlines that the approach to the services and support commissioned should consider the particular needs of all victims in the area and authorities must consider their Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 22 The annual budget for Domestic Abuse service for 2025.26 is £1.740m as detailed in the following table.

2025-26	
Domestic Abuse Budget	Budget
My CWA Core Commission - Accommodation Element	£ 150,000
Contingency linked to Accommodation Recommission	£ 100,000
Domestic Abuse Co-ordination	£ 86,043
Domestic Abuse Partnership	£ 500,084
Domestic Abuse New Burdens	£ 842,025
Expenditure Budget still to be allocated	£ 61,627
Gross Expenditure Total	£ 1,739,779

- 23 The annual budget for DA Commissioning for 2025/26 is £0.250m. This is the parameter for the new commissioned service for 2026/27 subject to grants being maintained at the same level.
- 24 The 2026/27 contract value would be funded from within existing revenue budgets.
- 25 The proposal in the paper does not impact the in-year budget as the contract start date is 1 April 2026.
- 26 On the basis of the above, there is no adverse impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Committee is expected to ensure value for money is obtained through the tendering process and assure itself that officers are delivering the outcomes expected through robust contract management.
- 27 Any unexpected costs pressures are to be constrained within existing resources managed through this Committee. The Financial Procedure Rules do not grant any officer or Committee the power to overspend.

Policy

- 28 The Domestic Abuse Strategy will contribute towards the vision of the Corporate Plan to deliver services that safeguards, empowers and cares about people. The Strategy enables the Council to be open and transparent about our commissioning intentions based on capacity, demand, engagement and coproduction in partnership with key stakeholders, and importantly with local residents and people who use DA services and those who may use them in the future.

- 29 This service falls under Commitment 2 of The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 - Everyone feels safe and secure, difference is celebrated, and abuse and exploitation not tolerated.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 30 An Equality Impact Assessment will accompany and support the review of Domestic Abuse Services. Inequalities identified will be actioned and addressed through the recommissioning activity and included as performance measures for the service to adhere to via the contract.

Human Resources

- 31 As part of the development of our employment strategy and staff code of conduct we will be considering how we support the aims of our Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- 32 It is believed that TUPE will apply to employees delivering safe accommodation services. During the tender all applicants will be provided with a full list of eligible employees.

Risk Management

- 33 Appropriate risks logs have been established as part of project governance. The purpose of this report is to highlight the risk implications regarding the safe accommodation provision and the need to ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations. The council could breach the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, by non-compliance to provide suitable refuge provision which is due for re-procurement by April 2026.
- 34 If risks are required to be escalated these will be highlighted on agreed reporting framework and through the approved governance.

Rural Communities

- 35 There are no direct implications for rural communities and the service would be developed to improve access.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 36 There is a direct and significant impact on Children and Young People with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognising CYP as victims in their own right. The strategy development and associated plans and commissioning activity will work towards addressing this and any identified needs and gaps to improve the experience of CYP.

Public Health

- 37 Victims and survivors of domestic abuse are more at risk of health inequalities than their peers. This strategy and the recommissioning activity are expected to improve the awareness and response in respect of these health needs, with support from a strong partnership vision and alliance.

Climate Change

- 38 The recommissioning of the service will include expectations around Social Value, this includes social, economic and environmental impacts. The service provider will need to demonstrate their impact on the environment throughout the life of the contract.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	22/08/25	26/08/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	22/08/25	29/08/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Jennie Summers	Acting Head of Legal Services	24/07/25	28/07/25
Diane Green	Finance Manager; Children's services	24/07/25	28/07/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>	Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services	06/08/25	1/09/25
	Tracy Stephen, Director of Children's Social Care	06/08/25	06/08/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Martyn Baggaley</p> <p>Martyn.baggaley@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1 – Needs Assessment</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Consultation Summary Report</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025-28</p> <p>Appendix 4 – New Safe Accommodation Model summary</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Comments & feedback (with responses) from Adults & Health Committee Members following briefing on 19/08/25</p>
Background Papers:	N/A