

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

09 June 2025

Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Service

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/17/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report outlines the council's approach to domestic abuse support within the borough including the current service offer and the initial stages taken to review the service.
- 2 The report provides details on the planned review activity and co-production with the public and stakeholders to shape the future service offer for safe accommodation provision.
- 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 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced to address Local Authority response to the provision of support for victims of domestic abuse. Key impacts included.
 - (a) Provision of Safe Accommodation: Local authorities are required to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children have access to safe accommodation and support services.
 - (b) Multi-Agency Collaboration: Local authorities must work closely with other agencies, including health services, police, and domestic abuse organisations, to provide comprehensive support

- (c) Annual Reporting: Authorities are required to report annually on the progress and effectiveness of their domestic abuse support services.
- 5 The council is required to work in partnership with agencies including, police, health, and domestic abuse organisations to provide comprehensive support and protection for victims. The council currently meets its responsibilities by delivering a range of support to from both internal and a commissioned a provider who delivers safe accommodation.
- 6 This paper outlines the journey so far in reviewing the current strategy and the commissioned safe accommodation offer. It aims to provide the detail on the planned review activity that will ensure that survivors, and their families including children and young people are at the heart of the service redesign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee are recommended to:

1. Approve the review of the provision for safe accommodation across Cheshire East for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
2. Note the engagement and co-production outlined to develop service model for safe accommodation and a refreshed Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy.
3. Note that the outcome of the review will be reported back to Committee together with a proposed future service delivery model.

Background

- 7 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced to address Local Authority response to the provision of support for victims of domestic abuse. Key impacts included.
 - (a) Provision of Safe Accommodation: Local authorities are required to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children have access to safe accommodation and support services.
 - (b) Multi-Agency Collaboration: Local authorities must work closely with other agencies, including health services, police, and domestic abuse organisations, to provide comprehensive support

- (c) Annual Reporting: Authorities are required to report annually on the progress and effectiveness of their domestic abuse support services.
- 8 Safe accommodation is part of a broader domestic abuse support offer in Cheshire East. This is delivered both internally and by a commissioned provider, with funding from multiple sources. See appendix 1 and 2 for details on the comprehensive offer in Cheshire East and needs analysis.
- 9 The Council currently commissions one provider My Cheshire Without Abuse (MyCWA) to meet the needs of those who require safe accommodation, in conjunction with a range of internal services within Housing and Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit (DAFSU).
- 10 The contract with MyCWA was awarded on 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022, with two, 12-month extensions taking it to March 2024. In 2024 a further two six-month extensions, via modification, were implemented (April to September 2024 and October 2024 to March 2025). A further extension has been approved and agreed with MyCWA for 12-months from the 1st of April 2025 to the 31st of March 2026. All extensions and modifications were negotiated and agreed with the provider.
- 11 Following the results of the consultation and engagement the safe accommodation service model will be reviewed for 2026 onwards and commissioning intentions will be defined to meet the duty under part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.
- 12 Work has begun across the Partnership to develop an aspirational Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse strategy for 2025 and beyond.

Service Review

- 13 The safe accommodation offer in Cheshire East is 16 safe accommodation units dispersed across the borough.
- 14 The current service vision is set out as
 - (a) The Domestic Abuse Emergency and Supported Accommodation will support people and their families who are experiencing or who have been subject to domestic abuse, providing high quality safe accommodation and promoting resilience, independence, and healthy lives.
- 15 In April 2025 there was a 12-month modification to extend the current contract with MyCWA for the delivery of safe accommodation provision across the borough to ensure the council meets its statutory duty following a failed procurement exercise in December 2024. A review is currently underway to learn from the failed procurement exercise.

- 16 There will be several stages to the review of the Domestic Abuse Offer in the following format:

Stage 1: Immediate Needs Assessment

Stage 2: Understanding, Reviewing and Engagement including Best Practice and Benchmarking, determine service model for provision

Stage 3: Service Development/Coproduct and service redesign

Stage 4: Recommissioning

Stage 5: Contract Award/Mobilisation

Stage 6: Service Launch

- 17 The review will also feed into the broader needs assessment as part of the strategy refresh.

Consultation and Engagement

- 18 It is proposed that in the summer consultation will be on the draft strategy as well as commissioning intentions for safe accommodation, as per the duty (S57) in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to consult on a strategy for this area.
- 19 Consultation and engagement are a continual process for commissioning see paragraph 16, as it provides the intelligence that inform the strategy, policy, quality assurance and performance of all our services. Consultation will take place with residents and survivors to shape and inform the strategy and the commissioning intentions/ service model.
- 20 The consultation and engagement approaches are shown below and will take place over Summer 2025:
- (a) Publication online survey and questionnaire for survivors and residents
 - (b) An online survey and questionnaire with partner agencies, professionals
 - (c) Virtual and in-person workshops with victims, survivors, children, young people, families and professionals. These will be advertised via social media, the council website and with current existing routes.

- (d) Virtual online Market Place events for providers to feedback on the commissioning intentions, advertised by the Chest Procurement Portal for wider markets to attend.
- 21 The results of consultation and a draft strategy will be brought to a future committee in September for approval ahead of being presented to the Partnership for final sign off.
- 22 Due to the cross-committee interest in Domestic Abuse Services in Cheshire East this paper has been briefed to the Adults and Health Committee members who noted the following.
 - (a) The Adults and Health Committee agree that the procurement needs to be taken forward and accomplished within the time frame so that there is a clear vision and strategy by the time the current contract ends so that vulnerable residents have access to appropriate services.
 - (b) The Adults and Health Committee want to ensure there is appropriate accommodation within the Borough and beyond so vulnerable users can be protected.
 - (c) The Adults and Health Committee want to ensure that the procurement process is fair and that all options are considered, including that of Cheshire East providing its own provision, with a fair spread of accommodation across the county which reflects the needs of the area.
 - (d) The Adults and Health Committee agree a robust communications strategy will be required.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 23 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 imposed several new duties on the Local Authority. Local authorities are required to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children have access to safe accommodation and support services.
- 24 The current safe accommodation contract extension is due to expire in March 2026 and the council will need to ensure from this point it can meet the needs of victims and survivors effectively whilst providing value for money, therefore the review will seek to determine the new service model in line with the approach outlined in paragraph 16.
- 25 The recommendation is that the review of the strategy and review of safe accommodation provision is co-designed with survivors to ensure that services meet need.

- 26 The proposal is to complete further consultation and engagement work to refine the strategy ahead of formal sign off later this year to ensure we meet the duty around safe accommodation strategy.
- 27 The recommendation and associated procurement activity will need to be carefully managed from a communications perspective to ensure that any reputational risk to the Council is well managed and the broad range of support to victims and survivors is known by the public.

Other Options Considered

- 28 The best option is option two, further options have been considered 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>Complete a review of safe accommodation provision in Cheshire East to determine a service model for provision.</p> <p>To review and determine the most appropriate model for service delivery and bring for a decision at a future committee meeting.</p>	<p>The review of refuge will ensure an open and transparent process for the service offer required.</p> <p>The service will be co-designed with victims and survivors and engage the provider market.</p>	<p>There is a risk that providers will not bid for this provision due to the budget, careful specification development and market engagement is required to mitigate this alongside a full review of the budget to deliver a service that meets need. See finance section for reviewed budget for 2026 onward.</p>

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 29 Whilst this report is before the Children and Families Committee, the Adults and Health Committee has been consulted which meets with the requirements of the Constitution. The Chair or any other member of Adults and Health committee may attend the meeting to speak on this item at the discretion of the Chair of the Children and Families Committee

- 30 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.
- 31 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.
- 32 S57(4) of the Act outlines the requirements for consultation in relation to a strategy under s57 of the Act. The Act requires that a review take place every three years and the current strategy expired in March 2025.
- 33 This report proposes a review of the provision of safe accommodation including consultation with stakeholders and development of a Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership Strategy. The production of a strategy as proposed in this report will ensure compliance with the requirements under the Act
- 34 Following consultation, a proposed model for service delivery will be brought back to Committee for agreement including consideration of any procurement arising from that model.
- 35 The Strategy will be developed with partners and brought back to committee for approval prior to endorsement and adoption by the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.
- 36 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.

- 37 Legal Services will provide advice and support throughout the process and upon the proposed service delivery model, any commissioning intentions and the draft Strategy when it is brought back to Committee.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 38 The annual budget for Domestic Abuse service for 2025.26 is £1.739m 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

- 39 The annual budget for DA Commissioning for 2025.26 is £250k. This is the parameter for the new commissioned service for 2026.27 subject to grants being maintained at the same level.
- 40 There is no direct reference in the MTFS to this budget allocation for Domestic Abuse.
- 41 The 2026.27 contract value would be funded from within existing revenue budgets.
- 42 The proposal in the paper does not impact the in-year budget.

Policy

- 43 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.

- 44 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

- 45 An Equality Impact Assessment will accompany and support the review of Domestic Abuse Services.
- 46 The EIA will develop further during consultation and engagement with survivors.
- 47 Inequalities identified will be actioned and addressed through the recommissioning activity and included as performance measures for the service to adhere too via the service specification and contract.

Human Resources

- 48 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.
- 49 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

- 50 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.
- 51 If risks are required to be escalated these will be highlighted on agreed reporting framework and through the approved governance.

Rural Communities

- 52 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)

- 53 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

- 54 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

- 55 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. This will be included as part of the service specification and monitored by quarterly performance measures. Targets around recycling, carbon reduction with the use of electric vehicle, employing people within the community it serves and offering services virtually or on a Place based locality will be measured continually.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Sal Khan	Interim Director of Finance, Deputy Section 151 Officer	22/05/25	23/05/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer	22/05/25	25/05/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			

Leah Benson	Senior Lawyer	14/04/25	21/05/25
Julie Gregory	Head of Legal	12/05/25	12/05/25
Rosini Beressi	Principal Lawyer	27/05/25	27/05/25
Diane Green	Finance Manager	14/04/25	25/04/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Claire Williamson	Interim Executive Director of Children and Families	22/05/25	27/05/25
Richard Nash	Interim Director Family Help and Children's Social Care	06/05/25	12/05/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Martyn Baggaley Martyn.baggaley@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Current Domestic Abuse Offer Appendix 2 – Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy