

To: **EXECUTIVE MEMBER ADULT SERVICES, HEALTH AND HOUSING**
27 August 2021

CONTRACT EXTENSION APPROVAL FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES
Director of People Services

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to commence the contract extension process for a further 12 months of Domestic Abuse Services (Refuge and outreach) from Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) from 1st September 2021 – 31st August 2022. The 12 month contract extension value is £79,694.16 and it will continue to be funded through the Housing-related support budget.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse services meet the needs of domestic abuse victims and their children in line with the following Statutory duties:
- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – new safe accommodation duty**
 - Equality Act 2010;
 - Human Rights Act 1998;
 - Children's Act 2004;
 - Housing Act 1996; and,
 - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the 12-month contract extension (via Contract Standing Order waiver) for Domestic Abuse Services (Refuge and Outreach) from Berkshire Women's Aid is approved.
- 2.2 That this decision is also placed on the Executive Work Programme and Forward Plan and that the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing is briefed on this decision because the accumulative value of the contract exceeds £400,000.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 This contract extension enables the Council to continue to fulfil its Statutory Requirements for domestic abuse services under a range of legislation as above. On 29 April the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent and extends 'priority need' to victims who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse and eligible for assistance. This means that councils no longer need to consider if a victim is vulnerable as result of their abuse in order to access accommodation secured by the local authority. It also places new duties on local authorities to provide support in 'safe accommodation' and to assess the needs for this provision in accordance with national guidance, and to produce strategy to address the needs identified. These provisions extend and enhance existing duties.
- 3.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has put additional demand on domestic abuse service providers both nationally and locally. During 2020/2021, there was a 2.4% increase in Domestic Abuse incidents reported to police in Bracknell. If this contract was not extended, domestic abuse victims and their children's access to refuge and outreach services would be reduced.

- 3.3 The current refuge contract with BWA ends on 31/08/2021. Prior to the pandemic, a review of domestic abuse services in Bracknell Forest was planned but this was delayed. A 12-month extension is being requested to allow time for this review (which will include undertaking a safe accommodation needs assessment and a producing a strategy) and any subsequent procurement activity to be undertaken.
- 3.3 The refuge and outreach service provided by BWA meets the needs of Domestic Abuse Victims and their families. BWA consistently meets the KPI's and outcomes specified in the contract.
- 3.4 The current service is well established, operates effectively and there are no concerns about the quality of the service. Productive contract monitoring arrangements are in place between the council and provider.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Do nothing, do not extend the current contract with BWA – this would mean that there would not be a full domestic abuse service to meet the Councils statutory duties. This would significantly impact the outcomes and safety of Domestic Abuse Victims and their children presenting to Bracknell Forest as homeless.
- 4.2 Retendering – up to 9 months would be required to undertake a full procurement exercise with a potential 3-6-month period to transition from the existing provider to a new provider and mobilise new services. Due to COVID-19 pressures on Housing and Commissioning, it has not been possible to review this service and then plan any procurement exercise in sufficient time before this contract expires on 31/08/2021.

5 Supporting Information

Service Provision (including spend, demand & outcomes)

- 5.1 A 'Domestic Violence Support Service' contract was commissioned with BWA in September 2015. There are two elements to the contract: refuge service with a value of £70,064.41 p/a; and outreach service with a value of £9,629.75 p/a.
- 5.2 **Refuge Service** – a refuge offers safe accommodation and intensive support which is tied to that accommodation. Victims, including their children, must be refuge residents to access specialist emotional and practical support. BWA provide 2 women's refuges in the Bracknell Forest area with a combined number of 11 places available. The refuges offer a safe and secure place for female victims of domestic abuse age 16+ and their children. The refuges rarely have any spare beds, as soon as somebody moves on, the spaces are quickly filled.
- 5.3 The below table shows how much BFC has spent on refuge services with BWA since the contract first started on 1st September 2015:

Contract and time period:	Spend:
BWA – Refuge 1 st September 2015 – 31 st August 2019	£280,257.64
BWA Refuge Interim contract 1 st September 2019 – 31 st August 2021	£140,128.82
	Total: £420,386.46

- 5.4 The table below shows the number of referrals to BWA for refuge over the past 2 financial years. Nationally, the number of refuge bed spaces in England in 2019/20 was 30% below the number recommended by the Council of Europe (*Commissioned funding for refuge services in England (womensaid.org.uk)*).

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Total number of Refuge Referrals	*data collected not directly comparable to 2019-21 data	*data collected not directly comparable to 2019-21 data	165 (not including quarter 1)	163

- 5.5 Refuge Outcomes are monitored quarterly. This table shows a sample of outcomes from quarter 4 of 2020/2021:

Outcomes	Percentage achieved
Refuge clients support plans completed within 5 days	100%
Within 24 hours of placement the following has been completed: - Risk Assessment/DAASH - Safety Plan - Referrals to relevant agencies	100%
% of service users who completed a planned move on (as per definition)	100%
% client reduction in risk at the point of move	100%

- 5.6 **Outreach Service** - is available to women and men regardless of risk aged 16+ living in Bracknell, and who are suffering from, or are threatened by, domestic abuse. The service provides housing related support and advice that enables service users to maintain their safety and security in the community. For domestic abuse victims at high risk of harm, an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) works with them from the point of crisis to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

- 5.7 The table below shows how much BFC has spent on outreach services with BWA since the contract first started on 1st September 2015:

Contract and time period:	Spend:
BWA – Outreach 1 st September 2015 – 31 st August 2019	£38,519
BWA Outreach Interim contract 1 st September 2019 – 31 st August 2021	£19,259.50

	Total: £57,778.50
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* In addition to the above spend, the DA Exec group also allocates £37K per annum for IDVA and Outreach services.

- 5.8 Outreach referral activity is monitored according to IDVA (high risk) and outreach (standard and medium risk). The table below shows an overall increase of 14% in Outreach referrals since 2017/2018, made up of a 31% reduction in Outreach (standard/medium risk) referrals and a 119% increase in the number of IDVA referrals (high risk).

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Total number of Outreach referrals (standard/medium risk)	178	148	150	122
Total number of IDVA referrals (high risk)	78	65	107	171
Total Outreach referrals (all levels of risk)	256	213	257	293

- 5.9 As a result of a pattern of increasing referrals in 2019/2020, and after reviewing the demands on service and the significant issues around capacity, BWA took the decision to close to professional referrals from 27th February 2020. This closure remained in place until 10th September 2020 until after additional resources had been secured and an additional outreach post recruited. Self referrals, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and Choices group referrals were still accepted during this closure time.
- 5.10 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the outreach service was particularly affected as at certain times government guidelines limited or prohibited face to face services from taking place and more families were locked down together making it more difficult for domestic abuse victims to access services. However, despite this, and the period of closure to professional referrals during 2020, there was still an overall increase of 14% in Outreach referrals.
- 5.11 BWA saw a reduction of around a third (34%) in referrals in the last quarter of 2020/2021. The largest reduction was in self-referrals (57%). Although it is unclear why this may be, it is likely that this may be linked to schools having been closed during much of this quarter. A similar trend was observed in Bracknell in 2020-21 quarter 1 when the first lockdown was introduced. An increase in referrals in Quarter 1 of 2021-22 is anticipated as schools have now returned.
- 5.12 Outreach Outcomes are monitored quarterly. This table shows a sample of outcomes from quarter 4 of 2020/2021:

Outcome:	Percentage achieved:
% of professional referrals acknowledged within 24 hours	100%
% of outreach referrals where initial contact was attempted within 48 hours	100%
% of client's reported increased feelings of safety at the point of case closure	83%
% of clients who feel they have been supported to improved safety of children (not applicable to all clients)	87%

- 5.13 The completed needs assessment will form the basis of a local safe accommodation strategy, to be published by 31 October 2021. The strategy should clearly set out the support needs identified for those needing safe accommodation as part of the needs assessment and the current available provision of support for these victims in the local authority, highlighting any gaps identified. In order to address the needs identified, the strategy should set out: the steps that Bracknell Forest Council will take in order to ensure the needs identified are adequately addressed; how the Council will address the barriers faced by victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or multiple complex needs; how the support needs of children within safe accommodation will be adequately met; the level of funding being committed to deliver on the areas set out in the strategy. This needs assessment will also inform the future commissioning strategy for any future refuge/outreach contract.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 Legal advice has been sought on the extension of the contract. This has confirmed that the process adheres to both Procurement Law and internal governance requirements

Financial Advice

- 6.2 The contract extension will be met from existing Housing budgets.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 Not applicable for an extension.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 The provision of refuge/accommodation-based support has not been reviewed since 2015 and it is therefore unlikely to fully meet the needs of all domestic abuse victims and their children.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to:

Have no impact on emissions of CO₂.

The reasons the Council believes that this will have no impact on emissions is that refuge and outreach support is delivered to domestic abuse victims and their children in their current accommodation by BWA staff.

Background Papers

BWA Contract Standing Orders Waiver Form 26-07-21

Contact for further information

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