

9 December 2019

Agenda Item: 5

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

FUNDING FOR SUPPORT TO SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE WITHIN SAFE ACCOMMODATION

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Committee of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for support within safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse
2. To seek approval for the County Council to lead a bid on behalf of a County partnership
3. To seek approval for the County Council to manage a successful grant in 2020/21
4. To seek Committee approval to complete a selection process to identify local delivery partners in December 2019
5. To seek Committee approval for the Chief Executive to commit the authority to lead the bid and to sign the submission

Information

6. Refuges and other forms of specialist safe accommodation-based services play a vital role in providing safe places and support for survivors and their children to rebuild their lives away from the threat of abuse. In some cases this requires survivors to move areas and rebuild their lives in a new community.
7. Safe accommodation comprises a range of possible services including:
 - Refuge accommodation
 - Specialist safe dispersed accommodation:
 - Safe, self-contained accommodation with the same level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge
 - Safe, self-contained 'semi-independent' accommodation which is not within a refuge but with floating support for victims who do not require the intense support offered through refuge.
 - Sanctuary Schemes – increased security in survivors own homes
 - Move-on and / or second stage accommodation

- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation
8. Safe accommodation is not only about having a roof over your head. It is about ensuring that survivors and their children receive *support* to deal with their change in accommodation and rebuild their emotional health and wellbeing away from the threat of abuse.
 9. MHCLG has stated its intent to introduce a new statutory duty which will require local authorities “to assess the need for and commission support for victims and their children within safe-accommodation”. The duty will be funded from April 2021, subject to future spending review discussions.
 10. Ahead of this new duty coming into force in 2021, the government announced £15 million in funding to run essential services in 2020/21. Funding of support in many refuges ends on 31 March 2020. Therefore this funding is intended to fill the gap.
 11. Whereas bids for MHCLG funds were previously coordinated by Gedling Borough Council and managed by Ashfield District Council, MHCLG now require bids to be submitted by upper tier local authorities.
 12. Bids to fund services in 2020/21 must be submitted on behalf of partners by 17 January 2020 and signed by the Chief Executive Officer.
 13. The complex nature of domestic abuse means that no single agency on its own is likely to be able to address the needs of all survivors. For example, many survivors and their children have additional needs, often relating to their abuse, which requires additional support.

Current funding of support in refuges within Nottinghamshire County

14. People who experience domestic violence in Nottinghamshire may access safe accommodation in other counties, and people from elsewhere access accommodation and support in Nottinghamshire County. Approximately two thirds of people accessing refuge may be from outside Nottinghamshire.
15. In the 18 months ending in 2018, 277 women and 489 children accessed safe accommodation of this sort in Nottinghamshire.
16. The accommodation costs associated with refuges are funded through housing benefit/universal credit. The cost of providing the support which service users require are funded variously by the County Council, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and voluntary sector fund-raising. 62% of all the refuge accommodation beds in the County are funded through MHCLG.
17. Using the public health grant, Nottinghamshire County Council commissions Nottinghamshire Women’s Aid to provide support in its two refuge sites.
18. Officers know of three *other* organisations in Nottinghamshire who provide a mix of refuge and other safe accommodation arrangements (e.g. dispersed units with support). Nottinghamshire previously secured £700,000 from MHCLG which enabled three women’s aid organisations to provide accommodation support costs for 18 months (2018-20). It is the *support* provision in these refuges which is funded by MHCLG and which is the primary focus of this initiative.

19. The previous joint bid coordinated by borough and district councils included the following partners:

- Nottinghamshire Women's Aid, Newark Women's Aid, Midlands Women's Aid and Juno Women's Aid (who were formerly known as WAIS),
- Nottinghamshire Office of Police & Crime Commissioner,
- Nottingham University Hospitals Trust
- The seven district and borough councils in Nottinghamshire County
- Nottinghamshire County Council

20. The current MHCLG funding of £700,000 expires on 31 March 2020 which leaves an accommodation support funding gap of 25 units and 128 beds. These units are hosted by four separate Women's Aid organisations, three organisations are fully funded by MHCLG, highlighted in bold.

Table 1 showing refuge provision across the County

Refuge Accommodation	Units	Beds
Nottinghamshire Women's Aid Ltd (15 units commissioned refuge by County Council and 2 units funded by MHCLG)	17	87
Midlands Women's Aid	10	53
Newark Women's Aid	7	32
Juno Women's Aid (formerly known as WAIS)	6	34

21. In early conversations with stakeholders it was identified that there may be other organisations which would be interested in being part of a future bid. Advice from legal and procurement colleagues is that the authority should undertake a light touch selection process to ensure that we identify delivery partners using an open and transparent process.

Grant available and service length

22. There is £15million available for upper tier local authorities to bid for. This will be for one year (2020/21). MHCLG has said that new duties will take effect in April 2021 which will be accompanied by funding arrangements which will be announced in due course.

Challenges

23. These service users represent a vulnerable group of adults and children. Leaving their needs unmet would also risk exacerbating pressures on other services. There is no obvious alternative way to replace the MHCLG funding which will expire in March 2020. The submission date leaves the authority with little time to coordinate the necessary work. The authority will be expected to manage the funding and grant award process. This process needs to allow for the possibility that there are previously undiscovered providers who may wish to participate in a bid.

24. For organisations which are dependent on MHCLG grants to fund the support they provide in refuge accommodation, there is a risk to the continuation of their services after April 2020 if the bid is unsuccessful. Organisations have already started to develop contingency plans

which include fundraising. It is unclear how much of any possible shortfall could be met by such fundraising.

Other Options Considered

- 25. The authority does not submit a bid leaving a gap in suitably supported refuge accommodation.
- 26. The authority completes the bid working with the existing providers leaving the authority open to challenge from any other potential providers.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 27. The authority will need to establish a partnership steering group to develop a bid.
- 28. It would be damaging to the interests of service users and to those of our partners if there is any reduction in the capacity of provision in Nottinghamshire.
- 29. There are significant crime and disorder implications to not providing safe accommodation for survivors across the County. Accommodation with support is one tool to enable survivors to leave violent perpetrators.
- 30. The authority will be required to manage and monitor the grant funded services alongside the refuge services funded by the Public Health grant.

Statutory and Policy Implications

- 31. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

- 32. The bid prospectus indicates that the allocation of funds to successful bids may be after April 2020, i.e. after the current MHCLG funding of these providers is due to run out. Furthermore it is possible that the funding awarded to Nottinghamshire could be less than the funding currently provided. Alongside developing the bid, officers in the Public Health Division will work with existing providers to assess the implications and to understand their contingency plans.
- 33. Development of the bid with partners will divert some resource in the Public Health Division. Ashfield District Council advise that ongoing management of the grant and submission of returns to MHCLG requires 0.2 Fulltime Equivalent of resource. It is not possible to include allowance for this resource within the bid submission. Therefore it will need to be identified from within other resources within the Council.

Human Resource implications

34. A rapid selection process will be undertaken by Public Health with support from procurement. The proposed selection process will ensure that the authority is being open and transparent when developing its partnership arrangements. A light touch selection process will be swiftly undertaken in December 2019. This will allow all potential partners to come forwards, for the authority to assess their eligibility and experience before accepting them as a delivery partner in the bid.
35. Following the selection process Public Health will work with partners and wider stakeholders, including districts to complete and submit the bid by 17 January 2020.

Implications for Service Users

36. Survivors of domestic abuse and their children will benefit from funds awarded as a result of a successful submission. Failure to secure funding will impact on the wellbeing of service users.

Implications in relation to the NHS Constitution

37. Further conversations are taking place with NHS stakeholders across the County.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

38. The service model requires additional funding to ensure that survivors and their children are supported to safely flee domestic abuse and rebuild their lives. This service will never be sustainable and will always require funding from statutory services. The current services add value through fund raising to make the experiences as comfortable as possible for survivors who often arrive with nothing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee give approval for

- 1) The authority to lead the bid on behalf of a partnership of county organisations
- 2) The authority to manage a successful grant in 2020/21
- 3) A rapid selection process to be undertaken identify local delivery partners in December 2019
- 4) The Chief Executive to sign off the bid submission on behalf of the Council
- 5) A short update to be brought to Committee after MHCLG has made known the result of the bid

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Constitutional Comments (EP 25/11/19)

39. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee by virtue of its terms of reference. Any grant agreement to be entered into and any contract to be awarded must be in a form approved by the Group Manager Legal, Democratic and Complaints.

Financial Comments (DG 25/11/19)

40. There may be financial implications for the County Council if the funding is not secured as refuge provision may be lost. If the funding is secured, it is estimated that a 0.2FTE will be required to manage the grant at a cost of £11,638, which will need to be met from the Public Health Grant or existing resources.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 'Commissioning Domestic Abuse Support Services (1 April 2019) – references the support to the Refuge provision across the County

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All