

7 February 2024		ITEM: 13 Decision: 110693
Cabinet		
Domestic Abuse Services Reprocurement		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Barry Johnson, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Housing		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director Childrens Social Care and Early Help Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director Housing Management		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Executive Director of Childrens Services Ian Wake – Executive Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public with an exempt appendix. Appendix 1 - Stage 1 Procurement Form is not to be published by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it contains exempt information as set out in category 3, as the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).		
Date of notice given of confidential or exempt report: 30 January 2024		

Executive Summary

This report sets out the proposed future procurement of domestic abuse services for both victims and perpetrators in Thurrock from January 2025.

All forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2022 highlights that an estimated 6.9% of women (1.7 million) and 3.0% of men (699,000) experienced domestic abuse in the last year. In the same year, data supplied from police forces nationally detailed that victims were female in 74.1% of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police, and in the case of domestic abuse-related sexual offences, the proportion of victims that were female was higher at 93.5%.

Recent years have seen implementation of new laws and policy to support the VAWG agenda. In November 2022, the UK became the 37th state to ratify the Istanbul Convention. In July 2021, government published the revised national plan to address VAWG, titled, ‘Tackling Violence against Women and Girls’ Strategy. This strategy includes a combination of prevention, intervention, and support measures aimed at reducing the incidences and impact of violence against women and girls. The strategy seeks to raise awareness and increase the understanding of the issues faced by people

experiencing these crimes. The strategy reflects the strengthening of laws (Domestic Abuse Act 2021) and policies to protect women and girls from violence. It acknowledges the long-term support that survivors need to help them rebuild their lives. This strategy separated out domestic abuse due to the requirement of statutory guidance to support the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. As a result of these legislative changes, the National Statement of Expectations and other supportive documents were also updated.

Government refreshed the Male Victims Position Statement, reiterating their commitment to ensure that male victims of crimes, which whilst disproportionately affecting women and girls, are also supported. Whilst acknowledging the disproportionately gendered nature of VAWG, government VAWG communication campaigns are inclusive of male victims to raise awareness, challenge harmful societal myths about masculinity, and encourage male victims and survivors to report abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 stipulates that a child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of domestic abuse, and is related to the person being abused or the person perpetrating the abuse, is also regarded as a victim in law.

National and local strategies recognise that men and boys are also affected by these crimes and Thurrock's support services for all VAWG crimes are available to any survivor regardless of gender identity or expression.

Funding for services supporting victims and perpetrators is currently split across Childrens Services and the Adults, Housing and Health Directorates, with some funding via the Department For Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC), known as 'New Burdens' funding. This report is therefore being presented as a joint paper with implications for both directorates.

Following extensive mapping, service gap analysis and service user and stakeholder engagement work with Essex County Council, Southend City Council and the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office, it is proposed to enter into joint procurement arrangements for services that work with victims (adults and children and young people) and perpetrators of domestic abuse across the Southend, Essex, and Thurrock (SET) area.

The identified benefits of these arrangements will be:

- Improvements in the pathways that service users navigate to access services
- A consistent approach to the offer of services across the area
- An improved service user experience
- Better co-ordination of services where service users are often transient through being forced to move area to flee their perpetrator
- Efficiency savings through pooling of budgets and reduction in overlapping commissioned services by different partners
- Realisation of savings will allow further investment in preventative services, particularly scaling up interventions with perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Commissioner Comment:

Reviewed with no comments.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cabinet agree the pooling of budgets with Essex County Council, Southend City Council, and the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office to jointly procure domestic abuse victim and perpetrator services as follows:

1.1.1 Childrens Services (General Fund) - £73,100.00 p.a. for a total contract period of 7 years – total value £511,700.

1.1.2 Adults, Housing, and Health (Housing General Fund) - £29,750 p.a. for a total contract period of 7 years – total value £208,250.

1.1.3 Adults, Housing, and Health (Grant funding to Housing via the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities ‘New Burdens Fund’) - £221,990 p.a. for a total contract period of 7 years – total value £1,553,930.

1.2 That the power to award the contract be delegated to the Executive Director of Childrens Services and the Executive Director of Adults, Housing, and Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Childrens Services and Housing.

1.3 That the power to agree decisions on the allocation of funds from the ‘Safe Accommodation New Burdens’ funding to any joint procurement arrangements and expenditure committed internally, be delegated to the Executive Director of Adults, Housing, and Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Childrens Services and Housing.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Local priorities and strategies, a number of statutory guidance directives, a national statement of expectations, and a draft bill proceeding through Parliament, in respect of domestic abuse service responses provide the background and responsibilities that should be delivered by Local Authorities and partners. These include:

Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 – Levelling the playing field in Thurrock

- The Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes a goal to improve the response to supporting victims/survivors of abuse to improve health and wellbeing. This is guided by the Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Action Plan, which includes a survivor-led strengths based pathway of support available to all genders, based on findings from engagement with local victims/survivors.**

Thurrock Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2023-2026

This recently refreshed strategy sets out the work that takes place with victims/survivors of both domestic abuse and sexual violence and abuse. Specifically, for domestic abuse the following priorities are identified:

- Communities better understanding what VAWG crimes are and the support that is available
- Increasing awareness across educational establishments and all professionals
- Improving multi-agency working
- Support victims of VAWG with appropriate services
- Appropriate intervention for those displaying abusive behaviours
- Ensuring survivor 'voices' are heard and play a part in service development.

Thurrock Council, Essex County Council and Southend City Council will continue to publish their own local strategies developed around local needs.

Home Office Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance 2021 (Safe Accommodation) and Statutory Guidance 2022 (all elements of domestic abuse)

This statutory guidance sets out the following responsibilities:

- Agencies (including Local Authorities) have responsibility to work together effectively to provide support and protection to victims of domestic abuse through strategic planning, co-commissioning, and creating joined-up services (2022 guidance)
- Multi-agency working should be embedded into approaches to responding to domestic abuse and should offer a range of interventions and support, from early intervention to support for high-risk cases (2022 guidance)
- Agencies should consider creative options to address the behaviour of the perpetrator, including Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes (2022 guidance)
- Local Authorities have a duty to provide safe accommodation, including refuges, dispersed accommodation and 'sanctuary' security adapted private homes and to deliver effective support within these (2021 guidance).

Home Office National Statement of Expectations 2022

This guidance sets out the key principles that are expected of commissioning bodies:

- Local areas should commission effective services to ensure their whole system response to violence against women and girls (VAWG) is as collaborative, robust, and effective as it can be so that all victims and survivors, including children as victims in their own right, can get the help they need. Local areas should have sufficient local specialist VAWG service provision, including provision designed specifically to support victims from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims, victims with learning disabilities, male victims, LGBTQIA+ victims, migrant victims, children and young people and older victims.

Serious Violence Duty

- The statutory guidance for the Serious Violence Duty published in December 2022 states where domestic abuse or sexual offences are determined to be serious violence in a local area, in accordance with the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, specified authorities should take action to prevent and reduce such offending. Local areas' strategy should include how they will exercise their functions to tackle domestic abuse and sexual offences.

Draft Victims and Prisoners Bill

- This draft legislation will further enshrine in law a duty on Agencies (including Local Authorities) to collaborate when exercising their commissioning and provision of victim support services.
- 2.2 Domestic abuse can take many forms including physical, coercive, psychological, sexual, financial, harassment and stalking (including online). Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 children became victims in their own right.
 - 2.3 The Council has historically provided domestic abuse services to both survivors (victims) and perpetrators (see Table 1).
 - 2.4 The borough sits at the upper end of the second quartile for prevalence of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police with a rate of 28.0 per 1,000 (England average = 31.2). Anecdotally there is a high prevalence of domestic abuse that is not reported to the Police.
 - 2.5 The effects of domestic abuse can be seen primarily across two of the Council's directorates, Childrens Services, specifically Social Care, and Adults, Housing & Health (specifically Housing). There are significant cost and resource implications in the management of cases within both directorates, with 1592 (17.4% of total) contacts made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) over the previous year and 679 contacts to the Housing Safeguarding Team, where domestic abuse was the primary contact reason. The social care recording system is complex and only allows one category of need to be recorded following a referral. In practice there are usually multiple needs, however the main presenting issue is the one recorded. The number of cases that present locally to childrens social care with domestic abuse as a contributory factor is closer to 40% and increases further as case status escalates to child protection, and backed up by national prevalence data which presents a similar picture.
 - 2.6 The current commissioned services are funded through both Childrens Services and the Adults, Housing, and Health directorates with two providers, Changing Pathways (victim services) and the Change Project (perpetrator services). Community support for victims is primarily delivered through an in-house Housing Safeguarding Team. Additionally, a bespoke service (Brighter Futures) that works over eight weeks with victims is commissioned with Changing Pathways.
 - 2.7 The system is a complex one requiring significant resource to manage these contracts, all with separate reporting functions back to the Council.

Table 1 – Service provision

Service	Provider	Current value of contract and funding	Expiry date
8 week structured support programme (Brighter Futures) – specifically open to Social Care / Prevention and Support Service (PASS) cases	Changing Pathways	£86,000 p.a. Childrens Services (General Fund)	31/12/2024
Community Support for victims/survivors – Housing Safeguarding Team	In-house	1 x Band D post - £32,722 2 x Band E post - £77,444 (1 x post funded through the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities - New Burdens Safe Accommodation Grant Funding) These officers focus specifically on domestic abuse and are part of a wider team managing other need areas including anti-social behaviour	Ongoing permanent staff contracts
Refuge provision (female)	Changing Pathways	£155,000 p.a. Adults, Housing, and Health (General Fund)	31/12/2024
Additional support functions within refuge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic support • Financial inclusion • Complex case support • Childrens support • Tutoring for children • Flexible Fund • Training for refuge staff 	Changing Pathways	£123,166 p.a. Adults, Housing, and Health (funded through the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities - New Burdens Safe Accommodation Grant Funding)	31/03/2025

<p>Perpetrator Change Programme – (including a Partner Link Worker)</p>	<p>The Change Project</p>	<p>£18,000 p.a.</p> <p>Adults, Housing, and Health (funded through the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities New Burdens Safe Accommodation Grant Funding)</p> <p>The £18,000 p.a. is a minority contribution funded by the Council – the remainder is funded through the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office</p>	<p>31/03/2025</p>
<p>Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and access to the ‘COMPASS’ single point of access across Southend, Essex, and Thurrock</p>	<p>Changing Pathways</p>	<p>£17,000 p.a. funded from Public Realm (General Fund)</p> <p>This service is already part of a pooled budget with Southend, Essex and Thurrock Councils and the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office - with Thurrock Council providing a minority contribution</p>	<p>31/03/2025</p>

Victim support services

2.8 Victim support services are delivered through a number of channels by the in-house **Housing Safeguarding Team** and **Changing Pathways**, a local charitable status organisation.

Brighter Futures – bespoke programme available to Childrens Social Care

2.8.1 The ‘Brighter Futures’ service, commissioned with Changing Pathways, delivers a bespoke one-to-one eight week structured programme of support to victims covering safety planning, awareness raising and education of all forms of domestic abuse, practical support around housing, legal, finance, employment and training, resilience building and emotional recovery.

2.8.2 During 2022/23 there were 145 service users who completed at least three quarters of the eight week Brighter Futures programme. 97% of service users were female and 3% male. This service is currently restricted to Childrens Social Care/Prevention and Support Service (PASS) referrals and cannot be self-referred to. Reporting from the service is often used by Social Care to inform court processes and risk assessment.

- 2.8.3 In addition to the eight week programme a universal drop-in service operates offering one off advice and guidance in respect of safety planning and practical support. This element of the service makes up the minority of the contract value and often supports service users who have previously been through the eight week programme and require 'top-up' support. It compliments and does not replace the main route into community based support which is through the Housing Safeguarding Team.
- 2.8.4 During 2022/23 there were 188 service users who accessed this drop-in support. 97% of service users were female and 3% male. 21% of these sessions were face to face and 79% virtual.

Refuge and associated support in safe accommodation

- 2.9 The refuge provision in Thurrock provides safe accommodation to 15 female victims and their children who are fleeing domestic abuse and need a secure home for periods which can range between three months up to a year, dependent on needs. In addition, there are three dispersed accommodation houses which are used when a resident is ready to start to move on or where refuge accommodation may be inappropriate due to the age and numbers of children, as examples.
- 2.9.1 Service users can be, but are not always residents of Thurrock, since the way in which this type of provision works is on a reciprocal basis i.e., Thurrock residents could be residing in a refuge in any area of the country and vice versa, so long as it is a safe area where the perpetrator would be unlikely to track the victim. The top areas where service users accessing the Thurrock refuge were originally resident are Thurrock (11%), Southend-on-Sea (13%), Basildon (10%), Barking & Dagenham (8%), making up two-fifths of all victims staying in Thurrock. Many survivors from outside the borough go on to settle in Thurrock.
- 2.9.2 Over the three year period 2018-2021 there were 120 residents in refuge who had a total of 175 children. The average age was 35 however the ages ranged from 21 to 71.
- 2.9.3 Commencing in the financial year 2021/22 the Council was awarded £366,530 in funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities under the New Burdens Safe Accommodation Grant. This was to recognise the statutory duties placed upon Local Authorities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to provide enhanced support in safe accommodation which includes refuges, safe move-on accommodation as well as service users living in their own home who are benefiting from enhanced security measures installed under the 'Sanctuary' target hardening scheme.
- 2.9.4 The funding was increased to £367,545 for 2022/23, £374,897 for 2023/24 and will be £381,970 for 2024/25. There is a proposal by the Government to incorporate this fund into the Local Authority Revenue Support Grant from 2025/26, however this is not yet confirmed. The statutory duties that are linked to the funding will not change due to this.
- 2.9.5 A proportion of this funding (£123,166) is being allocated to the current commissioned provider of domestic abuse (victim) services, Changing Pathways, to fund support that was identified following a needs assessment in 2021. Based on this assessment a number of areas of priority need were funded including therapeutic support incorporating trauma focussed counselling for both adults and children, financial inclusion (access to employment, education,

benefits, money management, tenancy sustainment), complex needs support (supporting and advocating to access services in the areas of alcohol and substance misuse, mental health, general health, housing, legal services and the Police), tutoring for children within the refuge, emotional support for children in refuge, enhanced training for staff in the refuge, and a flexible fund to support vulnerable service users who are leaving safe accommodation.

2.9.6 The remainder of the funding awarded through the New Burdens fund has been allocated as follows for 2023/24:

- £18,000 – support for partners of perpetrators attending a change management programme (where the partner is in a ‘Sanctuary’ adapted house or in refuge – known as the Partner Link Worker)
- £120,000 – offset against the existing refuge contract value – representing the support element of the cost of operating the refuge (and not the building costs) as is permitted within the eligibility criteria of the grant
- £20,000 – supporting a childrens group run by Social Care for those who are ether currently living in or have recently experienced a household where domestic abuse has been witnessed
- £10,364 - Flexible Fund – to support victims of sexual domestic violence who are in or have accessed safe accommodation recently
- £47,029 – supporting salary costs of the post that oversees the Domestic Abuse Duties placed upon the Council including management of the grant, needs analysis and reporting back to Government
- £34,600 – supporting the salary costs of a complex case officer within the Housing Safeguarding Team (in-house) working with refuge service users to secure their future housing needs.

2.9.7 Where this funding is pooled with partners this will provide further opportunity to achieve value for money. The Council will still continue to be able to ensure this funding is flexible and can adapt to emerging local needs.

Housing Safeguarding Team (in-house)

2.10 The in-house Housing Safeguarding Team offer support, advice and guidance to victims/survivors of domestic abuse in the community. Some of the service users who access this service will have housing needs, however these needs do not need to be present to be able to access the service. The team support not only residents where there is domestic abuse, but any resident where there is a safeguarding issue, from anti-social behaviour, mental health issues to hoarding amongst some examples. Three officers specifically support domestic abuse as part of the wider team.

2.10.1 The functions of this team will not be included in any joint commissioning arrangements. The team will continue in its current form and work alongside the commissioned services, as is currently the case. The team was established around the ‘whole housing approach’ which is a good practice framework to address the housing and safety needs of victims/survivors in a local area. The needs that have been identified in a joint needs analysis across the area will be embedded into the approaches of the team in order for them to respond to these effectively.

- 2.10.2 The team perform a specialist function that works closely with other areas of the Housing Service and has a focus on maintaining secure and safe tenancy and community based support, advocacy, safety planning and prevention advice. The team provide a service to all residents, regardless of any housing need, and work directly with private landlords and registered providers of social housing to provide additional security to survivor's accommodation as part of the 'Sanctuary' target hardening scheme which improves security within the home to prevent access by the victim's perpetrator.
- 2.10.3 The Housing Safeguarding Team will continue to be the default route for community based support in Thurrock, continuing the 'whole housing approach' that is well established. There is however a need to continue to provide a more intensive programme, as is currently delivered by the eight-week Brighter Futures Service. This model is needed to ensure that decisions about children within the social care system are informed by a programme that is of sufficient length and intensity to be able to assess the continued level of risk. This is required to make effective decisions particularly around child protection and care proceedings. The format of this programme will be reviewed as part of this project and will work in line with the some of the principles identified in the analysis that has been carried out across the region.

Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)

- 2.11 The Independent Domestic Violence Advisor role based within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is trained to work with victims of domestic abuse at high risk of serious harm. IDVAs provide high-risk victims of domestic abuse with a tailored and person centred safety and support plan so that victims and their families are protected from abusive behaviour. This includes, but is not limited to, immediate risk assessment, safety planning, advocacy, emotional support, and empowerment.

Links to Domestic Sexual Violence

- 2.12 The Domestic Abuse Act states that sexual violence can be part of domestic abuse in intimate partner relationships and can occur regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Sexual violence in a relationship is often not an isolated incident and often occurs alongside other types of abusive behaviour including physical and emotional abuse and is often marginalised. Services are commissioned locally with a specialist sexual violence and abuse provider and as part of the new model we will continue to ensure that there are close links between both services within the central point of contact and enhance and develop these where needed.

Perpetrator Change Management

The Change Project

- 2.13 A perpetrator change programme (The Change Project) is commissioned by the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office (PFCC) and funded via a grant from the Home Office and match funded from the PFCC, with minority contributions from Essex County Council and Thurrock Council. The Council contribute to this as detailed in table 1. The service is open to all perpetrators who accept the need to change their behaviours and can self-refer or be referred by a professional. Programmes can be one-to-one, or group based and can be short interventions or accredited programmes that last for six months. All risk levels from standard to high can be accepted for support with both male and female perpetrators able to access the

service. A Partner Link Worker supports partners of those engaged in an intervention to ensure their continued safety whilst the perpetrator is accessing the programme. In addition to the core programme the funding also extends to preventative work in schools with young people who are displaying abusive patterns of behaviour and also to young people who are deemed susceptible to becoming a victim in an abusive relationship. Funding is currently being released by the Home Office in two year grant settlements and is expected to continue but cannot be guaranteed.

Domestic Abuse Specialist Interventions Manager (in-house)

- 2.14 In addition to the above services the Council has a dedicated Domestic Abuse Specialist Interventions Manager based within Childrens Social Care. The role supports the risk assessment process by conducting these in respect of perpetrators and also increasing the skillset of social workers to undertake these assessments independently. In the year September 2021 to August 2022 there were 85 appointments completed for risk assessments or case discussions that consisted of meeting with the high-risk perpetrator of abuse alongside the social worker. In some cases, the role supports direct change management one-to-one work with perpetrators for cases with an open social care case where this is not being managed by The Change Project. Between these dates there were 14 individuals completing intensive one-to-one direct work. As of April 2023, the Change Project now work high risk cases as well as standard and medium risk, as was the case prior, and reducing the amount of one-to-one direct work that this postholder had completed prior to this change.
- 2.15 The above role is also responsible for chairing the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which manages and shares information on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of the police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As detailed above the number of services, access points and complex funding streams make the commissioning landscape problematic and in need of redesign.

Option 1 (preferred option) – pool budgets and jointly procure services with partners

- 3.2 It is proposed to enter into joint procurement arrangements with partners detailed in 3.3 in respect of:
- 3.2.1 Safe accommodation services (including refuge) and support for victims of domestic abuse.
 - 3.2.2 Victim support services for parents/carers of children known to Childrens Social Care (excludes general community domestic abuse provision that is delivered in-house through Thurrock Housing).
 - 3.2.3 Victim services for children and young people impacted by parental domestic abuse or young perpetrators/victims themselves.
 - 3.2.4 Services that work with adult perpetrators of domestic abuse.

- 3.3 In Summer 2022 Thurrock Council, Essex County Council, Southend City Council and the Essex Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners Office agreed to commence a project to understand the pathways and services across the region.
- 3.4 A mapping exercise has now commenced to assess the access routes into services, where these may overlap and where there are gaps in provision.
- 3.5 Service user and stakeholder engagement has played a key role in the project to date and will continue whilst work is ongoing.
- 3.6 A report was commissioned by Essex County Council through an independent research expert to understand the above areas. The final report was published in February 2023 (see Background Papers).
- 3.7 The initial findings from the report are detailed below:
- Commissioned contracts across different commissioning bodies would benefit from alignment and pooling of budgets.
 - A whole system approach is needed to address the fragmented nature of existing services.
 - The market needs development to drive through the shift change in the way in which services should be delivered, particularly moving some investment into perpetrator services.
 - There is significant opportunity to jointly commission services to simplify the current system for service users and achieve efficiency savings.
 - Tailored pathways of support need to be strengthened for underrepresented groups including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, deaf and disabled victims, victims with learning disabilities, male victims, LGBTQIA+ victims, migrant victims, children and young people and older victims.
 - There is a lack of refuge spaces in general and particularly where victims requiring a space and who have teenage boys (typically aged 14+), where this may not be appropriate for co-living with other adult female residents.
 - There needs to be a better understanding and involvement of 'by and for' services for minority groups to ensure service users know how to access support and are able to do so.
 - There is a lack of behavioural change programmes for perpetrators.
 - Long term recovery focussed support is needed for complex cases.
 - There needs to be a closer focus on children as victims, as they are now defined in law under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
 - Victims who are subject to coercive and controlling behaviour, rather than violence, do not always see themselves as victims and do not always access support.
 - Service user voice is currently an element to our approach but should be further strengthened to ensure service users are engaged in every stage of the commissioning cycle.
- 3.8. System redesign will bring significant benefits for service users through a uniform approach to accessing services which have the same offer regardless of where service users live across the region. There are however challenges in that community provision is delivered differently in Thurrock, through an in-house Housing Safeguarding Team working to the 'whole housing approach' with Southend and Essex having a commissioned offer.

- 3.9. A public health approach will be taken through increasing investment to tackle the root causes of domestic abuse, take a whole family approach, intervene early from young people in schools, and engage all partners to create a system wide change.
- 3.10. This will bring benefits to all service users but particularly to those who are transient across borders having been forced into that situation due to the risk from their perpetrator.
- 3.11. Whilst still in the developmental stage the initial model will focus on five key principles: **a single point of access** for victims/survivors, children and preparators with signposting to the most appropriate services, **a whole family approach** including the perpetrator where risk assessed as safe to do so, **engaging minoritised groups**, **providing longer term support where appropriate**, **breaking the cycle through investment in prevention and early intervention with perpetrators**.
- 3.12. These guiding principles will be applied both across any jointly procured services but also within the in-house Housing Safeguarding Team.
- 3.13. Savings will be realised through joint procurement and the benefits this brings. This being based on factoring in a reduction in commissioned values from the commencement of the contract in early 2025. The pooling of budgets and a joint procurement exercise will realise the benefits of sharing of staff and management costs across the current commissioned service providers throughout the region. Inflationary increases will not be awarded in addition to the pooled budgets detailed in 1.1 and will be built into the tender price that providers declare for the entire contract term. Providers will need to cost each year of the contract, accounting for inflation, within the given budget envelope. Despite this reduction in budget being made available there will be no negative impact on the capacity that services will be able to deliver, since the joint procurement efficiency savings realisation will cover the reduction in value and furthermore allow increased joint investment in services for both victims and perpetrators. Through the joint procurement arrangements and the continued use of Home Office and Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities funding the Council will be able to deliver increased capacity in service provision.
- 3.14. Collaboration between all parties who are currently engaged in this project will meet our responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance 2022 requirements.
- 3.15. In order to ensure victims resident in Thurrock have access to services that meet local needs, the service design will be based on local needs analysis as well as the wider analysis that has been conducted by the independent research expert.
- 3.16. The Council will have an equal partner status as part of a formal collaborative commissioning agreement that all parties will sign up and adhere to
- 3.17. The Commissioning Team will have close involvement throughout the commissioning cycle from procurement through to contract management on an ongoing basis.
- 3.18. A full competitive open tender process is proposed with some initial pass/fail questions eliminating those providers who do not hold the requisite qualification to deliver these services. The market would not be sufficiently large enough to publish a restricted tender two-stage process. Whilst services are being re-shaped based on the needs analysis, the proposed

solutions are well understood and not any more highly complex than other projects. For this reason, after consideration, competitive dialogue is deemed not to benefit this procurement. The scoring mechanism is yet to be worked through and will be agreed between the Council, Essex County Council and Southend City Council. It will focus on the ability of providers to work in much more cohesive ways bringing together a whole family approach working with victims and perpetrators, where safe to, in order to jointly assess risk and manage cases in a more joined up manner. There will also be a clear focus on shifting to a more preventative model with tenderers being judged on how they will achieve this and the measure of success being significantly reduced need to access high cost services when situations have reached crisis point raising the risk to victims to a higher level.

- 3.19. Contracts with a term of 5 years plus 2 would provide security to providers to enable them to recruit and retain staff for long term contract delivery. The geographical area that this contract will cover already has challenges in recruitment and retention of staff due to the 'pull' factor of London salaried posts. As part of the strategy, it is intended to commission a central point of access for victims, perpetrators, and young people. This will require multi-disciplinary posts which will be challenging to upskill staff into and with this it is critical that those staff are developed and retained. The strategy requires a change in the approach the workforce will take and would represent a significant investment of resource which we would like to mature over the agreed contract term. Additionally, the joint commissioning of refuge provision across Southend, Essex and Thurrock involves a complex set of multiple land and building leases to manage as part of the tender and ongoing contract. A shorter contract period may deter some providers from bidding given the particular complexities of managing the land and buildings involved in this tender. All contracts will have break clauses which could be instigated if necessary.
- 3.20. All of the services that support victims aim to keep service users safe from harm, including their children and to prevent further physical and emotional harms from occurring, which in turn creates a resource saving to a number of agencies.
- 3.21. On average the Brighter Future service is able to evidence from contract monitoring an average between 7 and 15 social care case de-escalations from child protection to child in need or case closures each year. It is important to note that the commissioned provider can only evidence and record this during the brief eight week period that the service is in place for. There are likely to be other cases that go on to de-escalate or close at a later date, where the service will have had an impact on the reduction in risk that social care identified.
- 3.22. The cost of social work time intervention is detailed below:
- Child In Need Plan – Initial costs £1,624 / annual costs £1,825
 - Child Protection Plan – Initial costs £2,328 / annual costs £6,570
 - Looked After Child – Initial costs - £6,044 - £6,569 / annual costs £8,000.
- 3.23. The service will usually not be working with victims who have children in care and therefore cost reductions cannot be quantified. However, the risk of cases escalating to looked after child status do bring much more significant costs, both in social work time and the average cost of a placement being between £35,000 and £69,000 p.a. (being the cost range for around three-quarters of our looked after children). This evidence of cost avoidance is only one element within the services that will be procured.

- 3.24. There are other costs to the Council with 17.4% (1592) of all contacts to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub relating to risk around domestic abuse in the last year. In addition, there were 679 contacts to the Housing Safeguarding Team in the last year. Every contact has a staff resource cost implication.
- 3.25. There are wider costs to the public purse which relate back specifically to the Council including: mental health, housing and lost economic output. These will have a direct budgetary impact on adult social care, housing and additional benefits paid through Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. As an example, only 6% of service users in safe accommodation were recorded as employed during the three year period between 2018 and 2021, noting that this is often as a result of the circumstances victims find themselves in and having to flee an area to escape their perpetrator.
- 3.26. Independent research both locally and by Women's Aid is able to demonstrate that for every £1 of investment in services there is a return of £9. The estimated socio-economic cost to Thurrock is £3.1m to Childrens Services (including education) and £1.8m to Housing.
- 3.27. The potential for savings detailed above are in addition to the savings detailed which will be realised following the pooling of budgets and joint procurement regionally.
- 3.28. Delegated authority is requested to award contract to the winning tenderer at the conclusion of the competitive process.
- 3.29. Further delegation is requested to permit the Executive Director for Adults, Housing, and Health to allocate funds from the New Burdens Safe Accommodation Grant. This will be in respect of spend from this grant being used as pooled budget in joint procurement arrangements and also for any spend that is used internally. This internal spend is currently in respect of the salary costs to fulfil the domestic abuse duties placed upon the Council and as required under the terms of the grant, the salary costs of a Housing Safeguarding Officer post, and the operation of a childrens support group for those children who have witnessed domestic abuse. Changes to these allocations and functions may occur in future years in response to a new needs assessment and any recommendations that come from this.

Option 2 – continue with existing commissioning arrangements

- 3.30. The existing commissioning arrangements fail to address the issues of complex pathways into services and do not provide the same opportunities as joint procurement do to realise savings going forward.
- 3.31. Due to the low value of contracts that are funded solely by the Council there has historically been insufficient interest in tenders. This results in a lack of competition and potential to attract innovative service delivery through a well developed market.
- 3.32. Recommissioning of existing contracts would continue to see services that may not be able to address demand issues locally, in the same way that pooling of budgets will achieve.
- 3.33. It should be acknowledged that at this stage of the project with Southend City Council, Essex County Council, and the Police Commissioners Office that as discussions progress the Thurrock model of community provision for victims may not fully align with our partners approach. This is due to Thurrock having an in-house community support model through the

Housing Safeguarding Team, whereas Southend and Essex have a fully commissioned service. Should a model not be able to be agreed Thurrock would need to continue to commission the current Brighter Futures service (to be reviewed and revised) alone, and only jointly procure safe accommodation and perpetrator provision with Southend, Essex, and the Police Commissioners Office. It is however the intention to pool budgets as far as possible even if Thurrock are the only Local Authority partner to have this type of specialist service that Childrens Social Care have access to. To do so will ensure efficiencies of joint commissioning are maximised.

- 3.34. Option 2 is not the preferred option, noting 3.33 above in respect of community provision.
- 3.35. The preferred option (1) is to continue to explore the joint procurement arrangements with the partners detailed within this report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The option of continuing to commission solely for Thurrock and not join regional arrangements would see the continuation of fragmented commissioning, and complex access pathways and different responses for service users who may be transient across the region. The efficiencies of a multi-agency commissioning approach would also be unable to be realised locally with existing funding without a loss in service capacity. Service redesign has up until now been explored and implemented where possible whilst avoiding any loss in quality standards, however this has not been able to realise the financial benefits of a joint procurement exercise.
- 4.2 The proposal to enter into regional commissioning arrangements will bring increased service capacity at a reduced cost to the Council through the efficiencies that are achieved within a small unitary authority when commissioning on a larger footprint. The savings to budget have been based on analysis of other similar projects across the country and the savings that have been achieved, factoring in the need to increase capacity locally, particularly in further investment in working with perpetrators to break the cycle of abuse. The current contract spend is fully budgeted with no variance to budget. See Financial Implications 7.1. The commissioning of these services in the way that is proposed will contribute to the directions that the Council is working to under the section 114 notice and within the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP). It meets best value through the 'demand management' element of the IRP.
- 4.3 The consequences of not delivering support services for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse would deviate from statutory guidance, draft legislation and the national statement of expectations as detailed in 2.1. It would leave victims without specialist support in safety planning, emotional recovery, and practical support, which would be unlikely to be addressed through local generic services. It would also see the continued cycle of abuse not being able to be broken without further investment in perpetrator services. There would be a budgetary impact on both the Housing Team with increased needs to rehouse victims and accessing the Housing Safeguarding Team. Further resource implications would be seen with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and Social Care Teams within Childrens Services. There may be a potential increase in children subject to Child In Need, Child Protection Plans and Looked After Children, without victims having the knowledge and empowerment to keep themselves and their children safe.

- 4.4 It is recommended that the power to award the contract is delegated to the Executive Director of Childrens Services and the Executive Director of Adults, Housing, and Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Childrens Services and Housing. The number of services and multiple commissioning arrangements across the Council and partners make this project particularly complex to mobilise. In addition, there are lease arrangements with the refuge and multiple staff TUPE implications. By permitting delegated authority to award contract this will allow a sufficient window of time between contract award and contract commencement, during which the necessary contract handover actions can take place to ensure a smooth and effective transition to the new service. There will be a robust procurement exercise which will ensure suitable providers will be selected through a full open market tender and evaluation process. By expediting the award and mobilisation process the Council will be able to start to benefit from the savings detailed in this report sooner.
- 4.5 It is further recommended that the power to allocate funding from the 'Safe Accommodation New Burdens' Grant both for jointly commissioned services and expenditure that is allocated internally be delegated to the Executive Director of Adults, Housing and Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Childrens Services and Housing. Decisions on how funds are allocated are reviewed regularly where they are matched to evolving needs. There is a need to undertake these decisions expediently to ensure that these needs are met with appropriate service responses.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1. Through the regional Project Group that has been established across all partners there has been extensive service user input to date.
- 5.2. Between July and October 2022 over 300 people were engaged in the needs analysis process from victims/survivors, perpetrators, and stakeholders through a mixture of online surveys, in depth interviews and focus groups. There is now a cohort of those involved in the initial groups who wish to participate in the ongoing 'lived experience' group. These service users will guide us through the commissioning and procurement process and be further involved in ongoing contract monitoring.
- 5.3. The market strategy has to date been focussed on ensuring that providers are brought along the journey that we have been on to critically review existing services and start to move towards a more joined up model of delivery. There will be changes within the proposed model going forward that will look different to existing ways of working. It has therefore been a cornerstone of our approach to ensure providers have been central to our review and reshaping of services, through involvement in stakeholder events and the opportunity to feedback in between these at every stage of the process. To date 1000+ comments have been fed back to us through the engagement work we have undertaken. This will have the effect of ensuring the market is prepared for changes in working and will already be thinking about the tender process in 2024 and how they will meet this challenge.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1. This report is aligned with the Council's 'People' priority. The new service provision will improve the consistency and accessibility of services for both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, simplifying and aligning the current pathways that exist with legacy commissioning arrangements. The proposed changes will strengthen the provider market

through consistent and medium term commitments to funding. Service users will gain empowerment to keep themselves and their children safe and resilient, reducing their touchpoints in social care, housing, and health services.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead Corporate Finance

10 October 2023

As set out in the report, effective provision of services that both support victims and challenge perpetrators is critical to achieve cost avoidance across several areas of the Council. The efficiencies that a joint procurement exercise with partners will realise will lead to direct cost savings whilst ensuring services are not reduced in any way. This procurement activity must be considered in the context of the Council's current financial position and S114 notice. As identified in the options set out within the report the risk of not having these services could expose the Council to significantly higher spend through a lack of preventative measures.

The contract, commencing in 2025/26, will have the following direct financial implications:

Brighter Futures (Childrens Services. 2023/24 Budget allocation £86,000 Core Funding.
Recommendation 1.1.1

Proposed cost 2025/26 £73,100

Refuge (Housing General Fund). 2023/24 Budget allocation £35,000 Core Funding.
Recommendation 1.1.2

Proposed cost 2025/26 £29,750

Refuge (Housing General Fund). 2023/24 Budget allocation £120,000 Grant Funding.
Recommendation 1.1.3

Proposed cost 2025/26 £102,000

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation (Housing General Fund). 2023/24 budget allocation £141,165 Grant Funding. Recommendation 1.1.3

Proposed cost 2025/26 £119,990

The contract represents an annual saving of £18,150 to the Council on its core funding.

In addition, there is also a reduction in the annual grant contribution of £39,175 per annum. This funding will remain available to the Council to provide services in line with the grant conditions.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Kevin Molloy**
Team Leader Contracts Team

10 October 2023

Following issue by the Council of a s114 notice, the Council must ensure that its resources are not used for non-essential spending. The contracts at issue here are essential and the provision of them a statutory duty under the legislation. In procuring the services outlined, the Council must observe the obligations upon it outlined in national legislation and in its internal procurement rules. Officers should ensure Legal Services are kept informed as they progress through the procurement.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

4th October 2023

A Community Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the refresh of the Thurrock Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2023 – 2026. This noted positive outcomes in every key area, further developed by the overarching local strategy and the service responses proposed in this report.

The procurement of these services will need to ensure they are compliant with equalities legislation.

7.4 Risks

7.4.1 Corporate Risk No 8 (Childrens Social Care, Service Standards and Inspection Outcome) and No 9 (Childrens Social Care, Safeguarding and protecting Children & Young People) identify risks of not managing demand with Childrens Social Care and failure to protect vulnerable Children and Young People. This could result in harm to Children and Young People and additional social care costs that are incurred through more cost intensive interventions. The services detailed in this report seek to prevent and change abusive behaviours that could result in the harm assessed within these two corporate risks.

7.4.2 Corporate Risk No 3 (Housing Needs and Homelessness) identify risks to increasing homelessness applications resulting in additional costs to the Council and adding to pressures on Council housing stock. The services detailed in this report seek to ensure that the cycle of abusive behaviours is broken resulting in less victims having to flee their home and seek alternative safe accommodation.

7.4.3 The funding landscape for these services is complex, made up of core Council funding and grant funding from the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities. Government funding decisions are sometimes made late when new rounds of grants are being made available or renewed. The partners within this project are currently

exploring procurement options to potentially stagger the tender based on known secure funding. Whilst there is currently no indication that this is the case, any reductions in Government grant funding may result in the future service design having to be adjusted in scope to work within the budget envelope. Any change to the incumbent Government and their priorities may add complicating factors to this.

7.5 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

7.5.1. Protecting victims of domestic abuse through effective safety planning and awareness raising, as well as working with perpetrators to effect behavioural change will both have a positive impact on the number of crimes that are committed within Thurrock and the wider area. One in five crimes in Essex are domestic abuse related, higher than the national, regional and comparator Police force data.

7.5.2. 33 of the current 105 children who are on Child Protection Plans are categorised as the primary reason being emotional abuse. Whilst this also covers other areas it will include those children who are witness to domestic abuse at home. Children are now defined in legislation as victims in their own right if they witness abuse at home.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report

- Southend, Essex, and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board – Discovery and Design Project - Executive Summary.

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Stage 1 Procurement Form – approval to proceed to tender (exempt)

Report Author:

Mark Livermore

Commissioning Manager

Commissioning Team (Childrens)