

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref AG/MF

Date 19/05/20

Commissioned Domestic Abuse Services

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Executive Summary

In 2019 a review of domestic abuse services in North Lanarkshire commenced with a view to informing future commissioning of services in this field. This review has now concluded and a report has been submitted with the findings.

This committee report therefore presents a summary of the key findings of this review, whilst also requesting approval to take forward the recommendations into a tendering exercise. The aim of the tendering exercise is to procure an inclusive domestic abuse service, which is able to meet current demand, address gaps in service delivery identified in the review and ensure services are compliant with legislation and national and local policy.

For context this report also provides a summary of the local strategic planning arrangements relating to domestic abuse and gender based violence which cut across a range of service portfolios and provides information on historic and current commissioning arrangements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Education and Families Committee:

- (1) Consider the content of this report and accompanying appendix, and
- (2) Agree the proposal to tender for specialist domestic abuse provision

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities

Ambition statement (14) Ensure the highest standards of public protection

1. Background

- 1.1 In North Lanarkshire support for those who have experienced domestic abuse is provided through a range of statutory partners alongside a small number of specialist independent organisations, including three Women's Aid groups. Strategic planning is undertaken through the recently reviewed and strengthened Violence Against Women's Partnership structure.
- 1.2 Whilst a range of council services are involved in the response to domestic abuse including Housing, Communities, Health and Social Care and Human Resources the strategic lead for domestic abuse within the Council is currently held by Education and Families with the service also hosting the multi-agency Service Co-ordinator Domestic Abuse. The Violence Against Women Group Strategic Group (VAWSG) is the key forum which drives the local partnership approach to domestic abuse and violence against women and reports to the North Lanarkshire Public Protection Chief Officers Group (NL PPCOG). Domestic Abuse also however features as a key priority area within North Lanarkshire's current Children's Service Plan and Community Justice Outcome and Improvement Plan.
- 1.3 Local Women's Aid organisations are key partners within the VAWSG and also participants in MARAC arrangements, a vehicle for multi-agency risk assessment conferences. There are also strong link to children's services planning through multi-agency screening and the 'Safe and Together' initiative. The three local Women's Aid organisations, North Lanarkshire Women's Aid, Monklands Women's Aid and Motherwell & District Women's Aid all function independently with separate boards providing services in specific geographies within North Lanarkshire. Funding streams differ across the three organisations however for all of the organisations currently include both housing benefit and the contracting of support services from the local authority.
- 1.4 Housing benefit payments are based on claims in respect of individuals/families accommodated in Women's Aid accommodation therefore the level of funding is not fixed over time but is linked to occupancy/demand. The level of housing benefit payments has recently been reviewed and increased.
- 1.5 Support contracts with the three Women's Aid organisations were originally established through the previous Housing and Social Work Service originating from the Supporting People/THB (Transitional Housing Benefit) funding arrangements in the early 2000's. Originally these contracts were based on housing support tasks undertaken within the refuges only. Following the ending of Supporting People grant conditions in 2008, a shift in focus enabled more flexible contracts to be implemented, allowing housing support tasks to be provided on an outreach basis, with the most recent contracts focussing on a wider range of support.
- 1.6 A previous review of service was undertaken over a lengthy period from 2011 – 2016 and led jointly by the then Housing and Social Work and Learning and Leisure Services reporting through Housing and Social Work Committee. At the outset of this review the Council identified a requirement that provision of Women's Aid Services should be undertaken by organisations affiliated to Scottish Women's Aid and compliant with the national organisation's requirements and service standards. In April 2013 however the review reported significant differences in service delivery arrangements across the organisations prompting an option appraisal and a subsequent committee decision to proceed based on a single Women's Aid provider.

- 1.7 In January 2014 Committee accepted a recommendation to progress on the basis of a restricted negotiated tender towards identifying a single service and later that year, following further discussion with the three organisations, authority was sought to revert to a collaborative approach to achieving a single service; however, attempts to progress this again encountered complexity and barriers and ultimately a revised proposal to continue to contract with the three organisations was agreed by Committee on January 2016 with reassurance provide by the positive evaluation of all three services by the Care Inspectorate. An intention at this time was however to continue to work with the three providers to identify opportunities to share elements of their management/ resources and to work towards a more efficient and consistent service.
- 1.8 Progress in achieving this was limited for a range of reasons. At the same time all three Women's Aid organisations voiced some concern over 2018/19 about their wider funding arrangements through the local authority. In moving forward it was also recognised that wider policy and practice environment within which specialist services operated had changed significantly since previous contracting arrangements were made with the publication of *Equally Safe- Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls*, the introduction of the *Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan*, the *Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme* and the *Domestic Abuse Scotland Act (2018)* and in addition local implementation of new practice models including '*Safe and Together*'
- 1.9 In view of this and following consultation with the corporate management team the Review of Domestic Abuse Services Steering Group was established in January 2019. This group's remit was to arrange the scoping of the current domestic abuse service provision across North Lanarkshire Council, to identify whether this met current demand in the context of the evolving policy framework and to make recommendations on the specification and approach to commissioning of specialist domestic abuse services as well as any linked changes recommended within council services.
- 1.10 Steering Group membership involved representative members from North Lanarkshire Council Education & Families, Social Work Quality Assurance, Chief Executives, Revenue & Benefits, Housing and Justice Services and additionally NHS Lanarkshire and Scottish Women's Aid.
- 1.11 As part of this, the Steering Group assessed it was advantageous to enter into procurement to commission an external organisation to undertake an independent review of service provision, thus avoiding bias, encouraging engagement, participation and open dialogue with all key partners. This approach would help inform any future design for a commissioned domestic abuse service(s) across the authority.

2. Report

- 2.1 In 2019, North Lanarkshire Council, sought bids to tender for an independent review of their domestic abuse services.
- 2.2 Following the tender process, Arrivo Consulting Ltd, with Meg Wright Consultancy were appointed in October 2019 to undertake this work.
- 2.3 The agreed cost of the contract awarded was fixed at £10,000.

Review process

2.4 The remit agreed involved:

- Mapping Current provision of domestic abuse services across North Lanarkshire, including consideration of key information such as background, funding, opportunities and challenges, current and projected future demand and views of key stakeholders.
- Identifying actual or perceived gaps within existing provision, including engendering views of how services and supports for domestic abuse can be further developed for North Lanarkshire.
- Taking cognisance of the views and experience of people with lived experience of domestic abuse.
- Supporting the Council to develop and plan future service provision.
- Supporting the Council's objective to reduce domestic abuse through targeted interventions

Review Findings

2.5 The key findings from the review are summarised in the appendix to this report but include a need to:

- Improve data collection (both qualitative and quantitative across services)
- Provide a range of services, including preventative, early intervention, recovery and behaviour change services.
- Ensure a consistent set of pathways and services to be available across North Lanarkshire
- Ensure gender informed services which can work with women as the majority of those affected by domestic abuse
- Provide specialist services for LGBTQ, BAME, men affected by domestic abuse as minority groups that are not traditionally supported by services.

Current Provision

2.6 The review took longer than initially anticipated due to an early decision by the Steering Group to extend the focus of the review beyond the commissioned services. This was to ensure the inter-dependency of work in this area was captured.

2.7 Consideration on how to take forward the learning and findings from the review was undertaken by the Steering Group at a meeting held on 13/03/20 and subsequently by lead council officers.

2.8 Following the receipt, scrutiny and consideration of the report; the value of the overall award and following procurement procedures and legal advice, it was agreed that the council would require to go to tender for its specialist domestic abuse service with the review findings informing the development of the service specification, with the aim of

commencing the procurement process late July 2020, Other actions arising will be progressed through the Steering Group in conjunction with the VAWSG.

- 2.9 In order to allow time for further planning for a redesigned service, whilst still maintaining a specialist domestic abuse service, arrangements were made to extend the current contracts with existing providers, (Monklands Women's Aid, North Lanarkshire Women's Aid and Motherwell and District Women's Aid) for an additional 12 month period, through an interim contract time for the existing service to continue, whilst the necessary procurement process for a new service based on the review recommendations, is progressed.
- 2.10 This process required a VEAT notice to be published to enable interim contracts to be issued while we undergo a tendering process.
- 2.11 Interim contracts were awarded until 28/02/21 to enable work to progress on procuring the service beyond this period.
- 2.12 Due to the accumulated value of any potential award over the overall contract period, approx. £1.04m over 3 years or £1.74m over 5 years, it is essential that North Lanarkshire council remains fully compliant with Procurement (Scotland) Regulations 2016 when procuring future domestic abuse provision.

3. Equality and Diversity

- 3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty – The continued provision of commissioned specialist domestic abuse services will support the council in this duty and in particular to address the well-established wider inequalities arising from domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
- 3.2 Equality Impact Assessment – The review undertaken and the proposed service specification and tendering exercise was and will be underpinned by a gender based analysis of domestic abuse in line with the national Equally Safe Strategy. In addition service planning will be informed by findings of gaps in services with respect to specific groups including LGBTQI and BAME and also with respect to male victims,

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

The current financial allocation for domestic abuse services across North Lanarkshire Council will remain at approx. £352,326 annually. Over 3 years this amounts to approx. £1.056m and over 5 years this amounts to approx. £1,760m exclusive of any agreed inflationary uplifts. This is currently split across 3 separate organisations, all incurring central operating and management costs. Going forward contracts could be awarded in separate or alternatively one inclusive lot, which may allow greater resource to be directed to direct and front line service delivery.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

TUPE may apply depending on the outcome of the tendering process, but this will be an issue for the provider services rather than the Council.

4.3 Environmental Impact

None

4.4 Risk Impact

As current contracts cannot be further extended any failure or delay to progress the proposed tender would risk the cessation of support services to vulnerable individuals and impact on the achievement of key priorities within partnership plans. Similarly the failure to review and update the specification for commissioned services would impact on the achievement of best value and risks a failure to address all needs and issues highlighted within the review process. As with any tender process there is a risk that the outcome may lead to change to some aspects of service to individuals however plans will be put in place to manage this.

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 North Lanarkshire Council's has an inclusive and holistic approach to supporting those affected by domestic abuse through a commissioned service that robustly interlinks with statutory services
- 5.2 North Lanarkshire Council's commissioned domestic abuse services is informed by and responsive to the voices of those with lived experience.
- 5.3 North Lanarkshire Council's commissioned domestic abuse service demonstrates consistency across all areas and demonstrates an improved ability to record and track outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse.

6. Supporting documents

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Review of Domestic Abuse Services in North Lanarkshire
- 6.2 Appendix 2 – http://womensaid.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Good-Practice-in-Commissioning-Specialist-Domestic-Abuse-Services_SWA_COSLA.pdf



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Appendix 1 - Summary of Review Findings

The following tables show the numbers of domestic abuse incidents reported to various agencies within North Lanarkshire and the police. It should be noted, however, that all research into this subject suggests that there is significant underreporting in this field of work.

Table 1: Number of reported incidents of domestic abuse in North Lanarkshire and Scotland as reported to Police Scotland.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
North Lanarkshire	3,963	4,006	4,406	4,587
Scotland	59,882	58,104	58,810	59,541

Source: Police Scotland

Table 2: Number of domestic abuse referrals received by agencies (North Lanarkshire), 2018-19

Organisation	Number of referrals	% of total referrals
NLC Social Work	2,661	60%
ASSIST	388	9%
Monklands Women's Aid	386	9%
Motherwell Women's Aid	298	7%
North Lanarkshire Women's Aid	262	6%
NLC Housing	233	7%
Lanarkshire Rape Crisis	93	2%
GBV Services	26	1%
Total	4,347	

The above table shows the distribution of referrals and self-referrals across the current domestic abuse services in North Lanarkshire. It is important to remember that some people may have been referred or self-referred to more than one agency.

The Violence Against Women Group data also provides some information on the profile of people affected by domestic abuse:

Of the 4,347 (above) referrals into services across all agencies:

- 3,880 (89%) were women and 467 (11%) were men
- 3,330 (77%) are adults with children
- 1,017 (23%) are adults without children.

Priorities for action

The review report identified the following priorities:

PRIORITY 1: Developing the infrastructure for planning and delivery of services

The review has identified a low level of awareness and inconsistent use of the specialist services across the Council services. As such, the Council does not appear to be getting best value from the specialist services. To achieve best value from resources, there needs to be:

- Improved joining-up of existing services
- Improved collaboration between services to share skills/expertise /good practice

It is recognised that improved collaboration between support services and use of resources will require a shared understanding of the issues including:

- a shared vision of the solutions
- a shared set of principles which underpin all practices
- a recognition of and respect for the skills which different partners bring.

The review has identified that there is a lack of sustainable funding for the Women's Aid services which will impact on the capacity of the whole system to meet need in North Lanarkshire. Partners will therefore require to consider how they can work together to develop more sustainable funding models.

Recommendations:

- Roll-out of the Safe and Together as an approach to families affected by domestic abuse across services
- Leaders and managers of services need to drive changes in practice based on the set of principles in Safe and Together.
- Training required for Children and Families staff in use of DASH risk assessment. A shared risk assessment tool would help to develop a shared understanding of risk would create consistency across and between organisations
- Develop and embed structured processes for domestic abuse. There needs to be structured processes which are recognised across all partners and which guide practice.
- Develop a data collection and management system.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for domestic abuse services.

Commissioners need to design agreements around measurable outputs and outcomes, which are commonly shared across agencies. Universal services should work to the same outcome framework. An improved outcome framework would also enable service providers to demonstrate their contribution to achieving the collective aim of reducing the incidence of domestic abuse.

PRIORITY 2: Building the effectiveness of existing services for people affected by domestic abuse

This priority recognises the good work done by existing services, however it also identifies gaps in service delivery and the need to address this.

Partners should undertake a collaborative process to redesign the pathways for referral into services, including for risk assessment, for each of the following:

- women (with children)
- children and young people
- women without children
- men

In particular, there is a need to provide clear and consistent pathways for those who are medium risk of being further affected.

There is a need to create 'pathways' which better use the skills/expertise and resources in the system, thus recognising that different providers can provide different elements of service

There is also a need to develop pathways for those who are less likely to engage with mainstream services including:

- LGBTQ
- BAME
- Disabled people
- Older people

Pathways must make best use of external specialist resources which sit out with North Lanarkshire (National advice lines, Regional specialist support organisations etc) and local services must be able to support people to access these.

PRIORITY 3: Build the capacity for early help and early intervention.

A new model should ensure it can build capacity to provide services for those who are currently not able to access services.

Key actions:

Increasing engagement in early help and Increase capacity of other agencies to deliver early help

Action:

- Consider current police mechanisms to increase take up of referrals to commissioned domestic abuse services
- Improve systems and pathways in Children and Families to connect families affected by domestic abuse with commissioned domestic abuse services.
- Create pathways from Education, Housing and Health settings to domestic abuse services
- Develop training for 'trusted professional' staff in other agencies to increase capacity of the whole system to deliver early and effective intervention.

Based on the above priorities, the recommendation of the review was a service that could be mapped in the following way:

Recommended Service Mapping Following Review – Domestic Abuse Services

Prevention	Early intervention	Effective services for safety and support	Tertiary Prevention
<p>Aim: to make domestic abuse socially unacceptable in any form, and to prevent abuse rather than repairing the damage once it has occurred.</p>	<p>Aim: To engage victims in services at the earliest possible stage to reduce the potential for harm and prevent escalation.</p>	<p>Aim: To ensure that people who experience domestic abuse are safe and protected from harm and have access to the right support at the right time.</p>	<p>Aim: to support recovery to minimising the long-term impact of abuse and reduce the risk of future abuse</p>
<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising awareness of domestic abuse (Staff) • Changing the attitudes and beliefs that allow domestic abuse to happen • Promoting understanding of healthy relationships (PSE) 	<p>Objectives:</p> <p>Early identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the capacity of all agencies to identify domestic • Increase engagement in services <p>Early help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity of services to support early stage/lower risk victims to prevent escalation of harm. 	<p>Objectives:</p> <p>Effective processes for victims who are high risk, and for those who are medium/lower risk</p> <p>Clear pathways which join-up services around the affected people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women with children • children and young people • women without children • men (with or without children) • hidden groups (LGBT, BAME) 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to services which support recovery and support victims to live an independent life • Make perpetrators more accountable • Support behaviour change programmes to prevent perpetrators from harming others.
<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increased awareness of domestic abuse • A reduced tolerance of domestic abuse • An increase in healthy relationships 	<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased early identification of victims • Increased number receiving 'early response' services 	<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People (victims) feel safer • Victims have access to the support and services that they need, at 	<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims feel safe and supported • Victims move on to an independent and safe life • Perpetrators reduce levels of abuse/offending.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased escalation• Reduction in number of incidents of domestic abuse	<p>the time they need them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People have confidence in the services.	
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