

Subject:		Award of MHCLG Funds for Safe Accommodation	
Date of Meeting:		16th September 2021	
Report of:		Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods and Communities	
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Ward(s) affected:		All	

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 In 2020 Parliament started to debate the new Domestic Abuse bill. On the back of this, Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) was awarded £606,288 from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to start to prepare for and deliver the new duties placed by the bill on Local Authorities. The bill has now been enacted as the Domestic Abuse Act.
- 1.2 The Act places new duties on the local authority to prepare a needs assessment and publish a local strategy on the support needs of all people who have experienced domestic abuse and are residing in safe accommodation by October 2021.
- 1.3 Following TECC committee in June 2021, members requested that a report was brought back to an urgency sub-committee setting out options for spending the funding. The report in June explained that the Pan Sussex Partnership was undertaking needs assessments including a specific Brighton & Hove assessment. Since this meeting the deadline for completing the needs assessment has been put back and there have been delays in completion, so it has not been possible to bring a report to the urgency sub-committee ahead of this scheduled committee. Although the full needs assessment has not yet been completed, due to the need to spend the funding allocated for this financial year, this report includes recommendations about spend.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees to spend the MHCLG funding as set out in paragraphs 3.3-3.6 of this report.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 In 2020/21 the Government created a £6 million Domestic Abuse Capacity Building Fund to enable local authorities to prepare for the introduction of the new duties in the Domestic Abuse Bill. On 18 March 2021, the Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in relation to the grant funding for 2021/22. The MOU sets out the conditions on which the funding was provided. The funding can be used to continue with existing support, to prepare to deliver the duties in the Bill (now an Act) and to deliver those duties. The Act puts in place a statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation. Tier 1 Local Authorities are required to appoint a multi-agency Local Partnership Board (LPB) to support them in performing certain specified functions. These obligations are to:

- **Assess the need** for accommodation-based support for all victims/survivors and their children, including those who require cross border support.
- **Prepare and publish strategies** for the provision of support to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims.
- **Give effect to strategies by making commissioning/de-commissioning decisions to meet the support needs of victims and their children.**
- **Monitor and evaluate local delivery of the strategy.**
- **Report back to Central Government**

3.2 MHCLG allocated £606,000 to Brighton & Hove for 2021/22. Whilst the duties in the Act are to support those in safe accommodation, MHCLG have indicated that the Council can use this funding to provide accommodation and to provide support to victims of domestic abuse who are not in safe accommodation.

Funding Proposals

3.3 The current contract for refuge provision in Brighton & Hove is held by Stonewater Ltd. This report recommends that some of the MHCLG funding is used to fund this service for 2021/22 at a cost of **£241,000**. The allocated BHCC budget which would have been used to fund this refuge provision can then be used as the City Council determines. Once the needs assessment has been completed there will be a further report to this committee which makes a recommendation as to how the budget should be spent.

3.4 MHCLG previously allocated grant funding of £99,962 for the financial year 2020/21 to RISE on the back of a bid submitted by them. The Council received this funding from MHCLG and provided it to RISE. This funding was to deliver services for LGBTQ clients. Currently RISE uses this funding to provide four units of refuge provision in partnership with Southdown Housing. Due to the Pandemic there was a delay in spending the funding and the Council agreed that it would roll it over to this financial year so that it could be spent in the first two quarters of the current financial year. This report recommends that some of the MHCLG funds be used to continue this work for the rest of the financial year. This would require a further sum of **£99,962** be allocated to RISE.

- 3.5 It is further recommended that the existing contracts with specialist community providers are varied to place an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) in the Council's housing service using some of the MHCLG funds. This would allow those presenting as victims of domestic abuse to the Housing service to be helped to access services and support at the earliest opportunity. The anticipated cost of this would be approximately **£30,000** until the end of the financial year.
- 3.6 Finally it is recommended that the Council contributes **£32,000** to East Sussex County Council to recruit a Community Engagement Officer to work across the Pan Sussex partnership area to set up a survivors lived experience board. This officer will also provide training, support briefings and debriefings to representatives for the Pan Sussex partnership board. Officers will also appoint an independent chair for the Pan Sussex Partnership board. The board is a requirement of the new duties.
- 3.7 The funding proposals outlined at paragraphs 3.3 – 3.6 involve spending £402,962. Further recommendations for spending the remaining £203,038 will be the subject of a further report to this Committee once the needs assessment has been completed. If it is not all spent in this financial year, MHCLG have indicated that the Council can roll over the remainder of the funding to the financial year 22/23.
- 3.8 Funding can be allocated ahead of a formal needs assessment having been completed where there is existing evidence of need. In relation to the proposals set out at 3.3-3.6 above there is clear evidence that they would provide valuable support to those experiencing domestic violence. The work undertaken by RISE to provide accommodation to LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse has proved to be invaluable.

4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The alternative option is to wait for the needs assessment to be completed but this would mean that the Council might lose some or all of the funding if MHCLG did not agree to roll it over to the next financial year.

There is clear evidence of the need for funding for proposals in this report. The Council is not able to allocate the funding to proposals for which it cannot demonstrate a need.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

There has been no specific community engagement at this stage in the process, although officers have listened to the concerns raised by campaigners regarding the previous commission of domestic abuse services in the City in 2021 and the needs assessment process engages with a range of organisations. The needs assessment will identify gaps in service provision and where the money should be spent to ensure that BHCC meets its duties under the new Act. The project team have engaged with people with lived experience as part of the work to complete the needs assessment.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report is to provide information regarding the new duties that will be placed on the local authority and is seeking a decision on how the award of the MHCLG money should be undertaken by officers.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

The MHCLG grant funding of £606,288 was received by BHCC on 9th April 2021. In line with the government's general position, MHCLG has not ringfenced this funding. However, local authorities will be under a legal obligation to provide vital support within safe accommodation to meet the needs in their areas, and report back to central government that they have met these obligations.

Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley

Date: 18/5/21

Legal Implications:

There is a degree of uncertainty as to whether the duty is limited to supporting those in safe accommodation or whether the Act requires local authorities to also provide safe accommodation. This is important as the funding is available to deliver the duty. There is also uncertainty as to whether the MOU permits the funding to be used to support those not in safe accommodation. However as set out above, MHCLG have been made aware of the proposals in this report and are satisfied that they are a suitable use of the funding.

The funding for RISE will be provided by way of a grant and there is therefore no requirement for the Council to undertake a procurement process.

Lawyer Consulted: Alice Rowland

Date: 1/9/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Whilst it is recognised that Domestic Abuse disproportionately affects women and women with children, until the needs assessment is completed officers will not fully understand the equalities implications.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4.1 None