

Subject:	Domestic Abuse Act Strategy and Funding Award Options		
Date of Meeting:	25th November 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 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act), which received Royal Assent in April 2021, places a range of statutory duties on Local Authorities. The Government has provided £125 million nationally to support the new requirements. The grant amount for Brighton and Hove is £606,000 for the year 2021/22 to provide support for survivors and children in safe accommodation and whilst not yet confirmed, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has indicated it is likely to continue at similar levels for at least the next three years.
- 1.2 Under the Act, all local authorities are required to prepare a needs assessment and publish a draft local strategy on the support needs of all people who have experienced domestic abuse and are residing in safe accommodation by 26th October 2021. Local authorities must publish a final strategy by 5th January 2022. The Pan Sussex Partnership project team have undertaken the needs assessment and have written the draft strategy attached at Appendix 1, on behalf of Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and East and West Sussex Councils. (ESCC and WSCC)
- 1.3 As many people experiencing domestic abuse receive supported accommodation outside of the local authority area they normally reside in, it was felt that to ensure consistency in the services offered that a Pan Sussex approach and strategy was the most appropriate route to take.
- 1.4 In September 2021, the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee (TECC) considered a report relating to the funding provided by Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) - now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). TECC agreed initial spending as set out in the September committee report and highlighted in paragraph 3.10 below. This report sets out further recommendations for spending additional funding.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees to allocate available funding in accordance with paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 of this report.
- 2.2 That Committee notes the draft strategy attached at Appendix 1

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Strategy

- 3.1 The Act places a requirement on local authorities to develop a local Domestic Abuse Strategy for the provision of accommodation-based support in its area. The development of the draft Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 was led by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and has identified strategic priorities and commitments for all TIER 1 local authorities in Sussex.
- 3.2 The draft Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 is being consulted on and has **6 strategic priorities**:
- **Consistent and Collaborative**- providing multi agency and partnership commissioning and working to ensure a consistent offer across Sussex
 - **Diverse and Appropriate** – providing a wide range of appropriate and safe accommodation and support options
 - **Accessible and Inclusive** – Ensuring all services are accessible to all victims/survivors and meet the specific needs of those with a full range of protected characteristics
 - **Responsive to Multiple Disadvantage**- Establishing specialist provision to support victims/survivors with Multiple Complex Needs
 - **Victim Centered**- Empowering victims/survivors to remain in their own home through choice
 - **Trauma Informed** – Embedding trauma informed practice in practice in service and practice through training and specialist knowledge
- 3.3 These priorities underpin the **Sussex Local Authorities’ commitments** which are as follows:
- Reporting to H-Clic (statutory homelessness data reporting system) must be improved in order to create a more consistent picture of the demand on Sussex housing authorities.
 - Reporting functions will be improved to enable future needs assessments to analyse out-of-area referral data in more detail.
 - Sussex authorities will provide more domestic abuse accommodation spaces for women and their children, in accordance with the Council of Europe’s minimum standards.
 - A broader menu of domestic abuse safe accommodation options will be developed in Sussex to better meet the needs of victims/survivors for whom traditional refuge is not appropriate or suitable.

- A 'Whole Housing Approach' will be adopted when commissioning new forms of domestic abuse safe accommodation options in Sussex. This will include provision for:
 - Dispersed, self-contained safe accommodation
 - Specialist safe accommodation
 - Short-term and respite accommodation
 - Sanctuary Schemes
 - Move-on accommodation
 - Second-stage accommodation
 - Better private rental sector options
 - Appropriate and accredited accommodation options
 - Flexible funding
- 3.4 The strategy highlights that all accommodation units will be appropriate and quality assured and that funding for this expanded offer will be sustainable and independent from funding for existing services.
- 3.5 The strategy includes several key findings relating to inconsistency and gaps in provision across Sussex. The key findings which emerged from the strategy are contained in Appendix 2. Many of the gaps identified across the three local authorities in Sussex for support in safe accommodation require considerable funding and require significant development including further consultation and market engagement and commissioning
- 3.6 Statutory guidance issued under the Act requires Tier one authorities to prepare and publish a local domestic abuse support in safe accommodation strategy based on a robust needs assessment. The guidance says it should be published in draft for consultation by 26 October 2021 with a final version to be published by 5 January 2022 as set out in the Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations 2021. Due to the timeframes demanded by DLUHC, the draft strategy has been published as a consultation draft and comments invited.
- 3.7 Once consultation has ended a further report will come back to TECC Committee for final sign off of the strategy. The Council has informed DLUHC that it will miss the deadline of the 5th January 2022 due to the committee timetable and the difficulty of establishing a special committee between the 19 December (when the consultation ends) and the 5th January 2022.
- 3.8 The Committee will be asked to approve the final version of the Strategy on the 13th January to avoid breaching the regulations. Officers will therefore schedule informal briefings with members following the conclusion of the consultation.

New Proposals

- 3.9 Brighton & Hove has been allocated £606,000 New Burdens funding by DLUHC for support to those in safe accommodation. In September 2021, committee agreed to spend £427,962 of this money leaving **£178, 326** to be allocated. It should be noted that of the £427,962 allocated, £241,000 was repurposed to fund the refuge service.

3.10 The spend agreed at previous Committees is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1:

DLUHC Support in Safe Accommodation Agreed Spend	
Reprovision of the refuge budget	£241,000
Housing Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) This will allow those presenting as victims of domestic abuse to the housing service to be helped to access services and given support at the earliest opportunity. The needs assessment found that often survivors of domestic abuse may move out of a local authority area to a place of safety and the Act requires that those survivors are provided with ongoing support which will be provided via the Housing IDVA.	£30,000
Funding to East Sussex County Council to recruit a Community Engagement Officer to work across the Pan Sussex partnership area to set up a survivor lived experience board. This officer will 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 Act.	£32,000
Money was also allocated to RISE to continue work providing dispersed accommodation for LGBTQ clients experiencing domestic abuse.	£99,962 until September 2022.
Interim Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and VAWG Commissioner	£25,000
Total	£427,962

3.11 The draft Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 has identified several recommendations which would enhance Brighton and Hove’s service response for support in safe accommodation and strengthen the local response to domestic abuse. specifically, appropriate move on accommodation, floating support, availability of in-person assessments for housing and support services, availability of interpreters and BSL easily available for housing and support services.

3.12 It is suggested that the Council incorporate the strategy findings into plans for grant spend. This will enable an enhanced level of support across the survivor’s route to safety and an improved **Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Pathway**. This pathway will ensure that survivors across tenure types are supported to safety, prevent homelessness and enable move on. There are four elements to the proposed pathway:

- **Flexible Fund** to provide short term financial support including rent deposits, white goods, moving costs.

- Increased access to **interpreters and BSL**, which will include additional funding to ensure victims are offered ongoing support to access accurate information.
- **Sanctuary Scheme option.** The draft Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 identified that Brighton and Hove currently do not provide a **Sanctuary Scheme**. Sanctuary schemes provide target hardening and installation of a range of security measures for those affected by domestic abuse. who wish to remain in their own home where it has been assessed it is safe to do so. This safety option is not appropriate in situations where the perpetrator continues to reside in the property. Developing a sanctuary scheme in Brighton and Hove would enhance the offer available to survivors of domestic abuse in Brighton and Hove. The scheme will require support from an officer to conduct suitability assessments and the provision of hardware.
- **Floating Support.** The Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 identified a need for **Floating Support** across the region. The Domestic Abuse Act tasks Local Authorities to provide ongoing support for those in safe accommodation, irrespective of tenure to enable survivors to receive support with the multiplicity of support needs experiences by survivors of domestic abuse (including those placed outside the local area) which include housing and safety. Brighton and Hove do not currently fund a Domestic Abuse Floating Support Service and the introduction of such a service would help meet the requirements of the Act as well as expand the local offer to all victims particularly those below the threshold for high risk to prevent revictimisation and be tailored to capacity build with those with protected characteristics and young people.

3.13 These proposals will cost **£170,000**. A proposed budget is seen in the table below:

Proposed Budget	
Sanctuary Scheme option Funding staff salaries and £40,000 for hardware	£70,000
Floating Support Service to include: FS Move on and resettlement support to work with families and individuals as they move to independent accommodation Funding for staff salaries and management costs	£60,000
Interpreters (Increased access to interpreters and BSL)	£10,000
Flexible Fund	£30,000
Total	£170,000

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The alternative option is for Brighton and Hove to wait for pan – Sussex proposals to develop but this might mean that the Council loses some or all of the funding which has not been spent (if DLUHC did not agree to roll it over to the next financial year).
- 4.2 There is clear evidence of the need for funding for proposals in this report demonstrated by the findings of the needs assessment. The Council is not able to allocate the funding to proposals for which it cannot demonstrate a need.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The draft **Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support Strategy 2021-2024** is currently out for public consultation until December 19th 2021. The needs assessment process engaged with a range of organisations. The needs assessment has identified 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 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 requirement to publish a domestic abuse and accommodation and support strategy and is seeking a decision on how the award of the DLUHC money should be undertaken by officers.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 DLUHC grant funding of £606,288 was received by BHCC on 9th April 2021. Local authorities will be under a legal obligation to provide support within safe accommodation to meet the needs of survivors of domestic abuse in their areas, and report back to central government that they have met these obligations. Current commitments for this grant are £427,962 as shown in Table 3.10 and the report recommends proposals for spending a further £170,000 as shown in paragraph 3.13.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 15/11/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The legal implications are set out in the body of the report.

Lawyer Consulted: Alice Rowland

Date: 10/11/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 It is recognised that Domestic Abuse disproportionately affects women and women with children. The findings of the needs assessment has informed the

findings of Pan-Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024 which highlights equalities considerations for the region including those with other protected characteristics. A full equalities impact assessment will be completed following the end of the consultation and prior to the publication of the final version of the strategy.

Sustainability Implications:

7.4 None

