

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	13 MARCH 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES: BUDGET AND COMMISSIONING		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	SARAH TAPLISS	TEL:	0118 9373203
JOB TITLE:	SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER	E-MAIL:	Sarah.Tapliss@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council currently has three separate contracts for the provision of Domestic Abuse services in the town for refuge, family support services, training for GPs and a grant allocation for outreach support/drop-in.
- 1.2 It has been agreed that budgets across all service areas will be pooled to enable a holistic commissioning approach and joint re-tender for Domestic Abuse services.
- 1.3 In light of the Council's financial situation, the budget for the procurement of Domestic Abuse services has been reviewed and options for future commissioning within a reduced budget in this area have been considered. In line with the Community Safety Partnership's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18 and benchmarking data comparing levels of provision in Reading with other areas, it is proposed that there will be a shift in focus and funding away from support within refuges and towards non-accommodation-based preventative and Outreach support.
- 1.4 Reading currently has 25 refuge places in the town, which at 16.1 per 100,000 population, is significantly more than any other LA in the Thames Valley. The average across the areas that provide any refuge spaces is 7.4 beds per 100,000 population, and across all areas it is only 4.8. To be in line with the average Reading would be required to provide 11.6 refuge places or 7.5 refuge places depending on the comparison used.
- 1.5 Refuge places are generally accessed by women from out of area as the majority of those fleeing domestic violence need to relocate for their own safety. Locally, 80% of refuge beds are accessed by women from outside the Reading area and occupation levels are typically 85-90%.
- 1.6 This proposal is therefore intended to maintain provision for local referrals and also maintain an important contribution to the national pool of refuge provision which relies on a principle of reciprocity.
- 1.7 A consultation was completed in relation to this proposal between 11th January and 10th February 2017. 120 online responses were received as well as a petition signed by 700 individuals protesting the proposed funding reduction. In addition two public drop-in sessions took place with a total of 13 people attending and two specific

sessions with a total of 30 services users were held. The report summarises the feedback provided and a more detailed analysis is attached at Appendix 2.

- 1.8 Further to consultation, it is still proposed that investment in commissioned provision is rebalanced towards non-accommodation based support services in order to meet a growing demand. This will result in a reduction in the number of Council-funded refuge places from 24 to 15 and reducing the funded weekly hours of support per household within those refuge places - both in line with benchmarking data. This will enable an increase in the budget for non-accommodation based support services and would deliver a £58,000 saving against the total Domestic Abuse services budget. Combined with previous reductions that have been agreed, this would result in a total budget of £345,000, a 22% reduction in spend in comparison to the current 2016/17 budget for Domestic Abuse services.
- 1.9 Many respondents to the consultation raised concerns in respect of a reduction in the local contribution to refuge provision nationally (whilst recognising disparities and inequity in levels of funding across Authorities) However, it should be noted that women fleeing domestic violence who may be unable (or may not wish) to access a refuge bed and don't have anywhere to live can apply to any Council for help as a homeless person. In most cases, that Council has to provide accommodation immediately while it makes enquiries into the household's situation and determines whether it has a duty to accommodate them permanently.
- 1.10 Reading Borough Council has also successfully submitted a partnership bid for short-term Government funding and £131,000 has been awarded including £56,000 for additional specialist refuge places for the Thames Valley. The funding will also provide specialist support for professionals in respect of Honour Based Abuse or Forced Marriage across the Thames Valley, and will fund a review of service requirements.
- 1.11 Two new contracts will be procured for all Domestic Abuse services with start dates of 1st October 2017. It is proposed that the reduced refuge contract will be negotiated directly with the existing provider to avoid an additional financial risk to the Council. A provider for all non-accommodation based services will be procured via competitive tender exercise.
- 1.12 In order to maintain services until the start of the new contract, it is proposed that two of the existing contracts (with the value of the refuge contract stepping down in July) and the agreed grant arrangements are extended until the 1st October 2017.
- 1.13 Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment for options outlined in this report.
Appendix 2 - Consultation Summary Report

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee note the summary of the consultation responses as set out in appendix 2.
- 2.2 That Policy Committee endorses the rebalancing of investment - increasing funding for non-accommodation based Domestic Abuse services and reducing funding for refuge services in line with benchmarking information, which will deliver an overall saving of £58,000 p.a.
- 2.3 That Policy Committee resolves to award a contract to provide support at 15 refuge places to Berkshire Women's Aid for an initial period of 3 years, with an option to extend for two further consecutive periods each of 1 year, with a start date of 1st October 2017, and that authority is delegated to the Director of

Environment and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, to finalise the negotiated terms of the contract with Berkshire Women's Aid.

- 2.4 That Policy Committee provide delegated authority to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, to award the contract for non-accommodation based Domestic Abuse services for an initial period of 3 years with an option to extend for two further consecutive periods each of 1 year.
- 2.5 That Policy Committee agree to the extension of the existing grant arrangements, Family Choices contract and refuge contract until 1st October 2017.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

Domestic Abuse

- 3.1 Reading's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18 outlines Reading's focus for tackling domestic abuse over the three year period. Reading provides a good range of services and support for victims of domestic abuse. However, activity data indicates that the number of reported incidents of domestic abuse in Reading remains above average for the Thames Valley area. The strategy aims to continue to improve the offer for those experiencing domestic abuse and their families and deliver the best possible coordinated response to the challenge of domestic abuse in Reading.
- 3.2 The strategy identifies four key areas of focus:
- **Encouraging people to seek support earlier** - improving information, education and prevention
 - **Providing the right response first time** - improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.
 - **Having the right services available** - improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change abusive behaviour.
 - **Understanding of the challenges in our town** - improving data analysis and community engagement.
- 3.3 Reading Borough Council has a strong history of providing refuge provision in the town for those experiencing domestic abuse. There is a reciprocal nature to refuge provision as the majority of those fleeing domestic abuse need to be accommodated out of area for their own safety. However, with Local Authorities (LA) finances under increasing pressure a number of Authorities have reduced or ceased all provision on the basis that it doesn't meet local need and have redirected funding to other priorities. This is creating a national shortage and there are calls for a national system to fund provision.
- 3.4 Reading currently has 25 refuge places in the town, which is significantly more per 100,000 population (16.1) than any other LA in the Thames Valley and also Southampton who were included in the benchmarking exercise. The next highest is Milton Keynes who provide 11 units per 100,000 population. The average across the areas that provide any refuge spaces is 7.4 beds per 100,000 population, and across all areas it is 4.8. To be in line with the average Reading would be required to provide 11.6 refuge places or 7.5 refuge places depending on the comparison used. Locally, 80% of refuge beds are accessed by women from outside the Reading area and occupation levels are typically 85-90%.

- 3.5 Recent activity data in relation to domestic abuse indicates a significant increase in referrals for non-refuge based support such as Outreach support, support through the Criminal Justice System and support to break the cycle of abuse. 2015/16 saw a 28% increase in referrals to BWA for Outreach services in comparison to the previous year, and an equal increase was seen in the number of referrals to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which considers high risk domestic abuse cases. In addition, a number of support services within the Local Authority and wider partnership, for example Children's Social Care, have seen a significant increase in demand for services as a result of domestic abuse. In many ways this is a positive change, especially as Police crime reports have not increased at the same pace, as it indicates more people are seeking support, and seeking support earlier, to stop or reduce any domestic abuse they are experiencing. However, this increase in demand needs to be managed within challenging financial constraints.

The Council's Financial Position

- 3.6 To contextualise, continued reduction in Government revenue support grant to Local Authorities coupled with rising demand has placed severe pressure on the Council's budgets. This has meant that, although the Council has agreed just over £70m savings in the period 2010 to 2016, there is a continuing budget gap of £44m over the next three years. This presents a very significant challenge to the Authority and means that it is facing unpalatable decisions and unprecedented cuts to services.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position:

- 4.1 In the current financial year RBC has three separate contracts and a grant funding agreement, funded by different service areas, for the provision of Domestic Abuse services in the town. These contracts plus the grant total £440,000 and the largest contract covers the refuge provision (£254,000).
- 4.2 New contract arrangements are due to be implemented in 2017 and the budgets across all services areas will be pooled to enable two new contracts to be awarded in relation to Domestic Abuse services. Contributions from the different services areas into the pooled budget for 17/18 were previously expected to total £403,000, reflecting reductions in budget already agreed via the Voluntary Sector Grants review in 2015 and a 20% reduction to the 'Family Choices' contract already approved as a saving at the July 2016 Policy Committee. These reductions result in the overall budget for Domestic Abuse services in 17/18 being reduced by £37,000 (8%) in comparison to 16/17.

Options Proposed

- 4.3 As stated above, Reading Borough Council funds significantly in excess of the average number of refuge beds per 100,000 population when compared to other Authorities. Meanwhile, demand for non-accommodation based support services is increasing. The Council therefore proposes to rebalance investment in commissioned provision to align with strategic priorities and deliver a saving.
- 4.4 It is proposed that funding for support at the refuge provision is significantly reduced from the current level of £254,000 to c. £90,000 in line with benchmarking data. This reduction would be achieved by reducing the funded weekly hours of support per household within the refuge; by a reduction in refuge places; and by paying a more competitive hourly rate - all in line with benchmarking data.

- 4.5 This level of funding would support circa 15 refuge places in the town, 4 of which would be specialist provision for women from the Asian Community (reduced from 8). The number of support hours would reduce from 10 per week, per household, to either 6 or 7.5 (the latter for those in specialist provision).
- 4.6 This proposal is intended to maintain provision for local referrals and also maintain a contribution to the national pool of refuge provision which relies on a principle of reciprocity.
- 4.7 This does not mean that the number of refuge places in Reading will necessarily reduce, this is a matter for the incumbent provider and the availability of alternative funding, only that the number of commissioned refuge spaces where support is funded by the Council will reduce. Reading Borough Council has recently submitted a partnership bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and has been successful in obtaining funds that can maintain support for additional refuge places to serve the Thames Valley.
- 4.8 The reduction in funding for refuge accommodation will enable an increase in the budget for non-accommodation based support and services to help meet the increasing demand, and a £58,000 saving against the total Domestic Abuse services budget.
- 4.9 The overall annual budget for Domestic Abuse services would be £345,000. This represents a further 14% reduction in the budget for Domestic Abuse services and combined with the £37,000 reduction set out above would result in a total reduction of £95,000 (22%) in budget for Domestic Abuse services for 2017/18 in comparison to 2016/17.
- 4.10 The remaining budget of c. £255,000 would fund non-accommodation based services in line with the Council's strategic commitment. This would include, but not be limited to:
- Outreach/specialist IDVA¹ support for people experiencing abuse to help them safeguard themselves and their families
 - Drop in services
 - 'Breaking the cycle' support (including support for the whole family: perpetrator, person experiencing abuse and any children or young people affected; individual or group work)
 - Training/ support for Council staff and the voluntary sector
 - Raising awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and the services available
 - Specialist training for GPs to increase identification and referrals
 - Specialist work with children and young people affected by domestic abuse
 - Universal work with young people to educate on the importance of healthy relationships
 - Administrative support/helpline

Consultation Summary

- 4.11 This proposal has been subject to public consultation between 11th January and 10th February 2017. 120 online responses were received, two public drop-in sessions took place with a total of 13 people attending, and two specific sessions with a total of 30 services users were held. A petition has also been organised with over 700 signatures protesting the proposed reductions. Consultation sessions were also held with partner agencies. Of those responding online, 38% identified as a local resident, 21% identified

¹ *Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) focus on high risk clients, supporting them to develop safety management strategies to safeguard themselves and their dependents. A central part of the role involves supporting them to access and navigate through the Criminal Justice System.*

as a current or former user of Domestic Abuse services (or their family member), the remaining 41% of respondents were mainly professionals or volunteers working in Domestic Abuse services or related areas.

- 4.12 The majority of respondents to the consultation raised concerns about the impact of a potential reduction in the number of refuge places available nationally - regardless of local need or who is funding the provision. There is a clear recognition that there is inequity in levels of funding and provision of refuge places across Authorities and there is support for a national model of funding refuge provision to address this. Although there was also support for increasing investment in non-accommodation based services required in order to reflect local need, respondents stated that they believe that a reduction in refuge will result in more women and children staying in unsafe situations as they have no alternative safe accommodation to move to. Respondents may not be aware of the protections afforded by homelessness legislation as detailed at 4.17.
- 4.13 When responding to questions about priorities for future services there was a more varied response. The strongest theme of the consultation was that there is a need for a range of services from prevention activity in schools, crisis intervention and support to break the cycle of abuse. None of the suggested services required for the town were outside of the scope of the proposed specification for services.
- 4.14 The following areas were seen as a priority for non-accommodation based support:
- Telephone support/helpline
 - Outreach support (1:1 emotional support and practical support navigating services such as housing, benefits and help to access legal services and support through the criminal justice process)
 - Support for young people affected
 - Training and support for front line workers to identify signs of abuse
 - Support for perpetrators to change behaviour
- 4.15 Existing and former service users stressed the importance of group work to help talk through their situation and find the confidence to either leave an abusive relationship or avoid repeating the pattern in future relationships. The need for more education for young people to understand the risks of domestic abuse and what a healthy relationship looks like was considered a high priority also.

Other options considered

- 4.16 Committee could determine not to make the saving, or to direct a different split of funding between the two proposed contracts. However, statutory and voluntary sector agencies have highlighted a clear pressure on non-accommodation support services which are significantly over-subscribed. There is also insufficient resource to support preventative work in schools and with perpetrators which has been reinforced through the consultation. The average level of refuge provision across 17 similar Authorities is 7 per 100,000 population. On this basis, Reading would be supporting a significantly greater than average contribution to the national pool of refuge places.
- 4.17 Women fleeing violence who may be unable to access a refuge bed and don't have anywhere to live can apply to any Council for help as a homeless person (without the need for a local connection to that area). In most cases, that Council has to provide accommodation immediately while it makes enquiries into the household's situation and determines whether it has a duty to accommodate them permanently. In Reading, specialist Outreach support is and will continue to be available to such households through commissioned services. However, it is recognised that refuges provide key,

short-term and intensive support for many women fleeing abuse and this provision will continue to be available in Reading.

PROPOSED COMMISSIONING PROCESS

- 4.18 It is proposed that as part of the reshape of services there will be two separate contracts, one for the refuge provision and one for all other non-accommodation based services.

Refuge Based Support Contract

- 4.19 A key risk identified in re-tendering refuge support services is that in the event of the incumbent housing provider being unsuccessful in winning the tender, it is likely that they would continue to provide refuge accommodation options even if there is limited funding for support within the units. This could therefore result in a significant increase, potentially double, in the number of refuge accommodation places in the town as has happened elsewhere. As Reading already has a high level of provision in comparison to the rest of the Thames Valley, double provision would create an increased demand pressure on services.

- 4.20 In order to mitigate this risk it is proposed that a new contract for refuge support provision is awarded to the current provider (BWA) with new terms, as they are the only refuge provider that already has established accommodation in the town. The service for the refuge based support is governed by the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and by the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and is subject to the Light Touch Regime (LTR). As the value of the proposed contract is below the LTR threshold of £589k, it is not required to be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). Contract Procedure Rule 4(2) permits a contract which is not required to be advertised in OJEU to be awarded without a tender process where demonstrable benefits in service or value for money or price are likely to be obtainable by way of direct negotiation with the potential supplier or contractors and a business case with supporting evidence is approved by the Director/Head of Service.

Non-accommodation based services

- 4.21 The contract value for non-accommodation based services is £255k a year, £1.275m over the 5 year maximum term (3 years with two one year extensions). This contract will be awarded following an OJEU advertised competitive tender with a start date of 1st October 2017. Therefore delegated authority is sought to award the contract to the successful bidder.
- 4.22 The specification for this contract has been developed in partnership with organisations across the Community Safety Partnership and has been shaped by both the public consultation and direct provider engagement.

Extension of existing contracts

- 4.23 For both procurement exercises, the start date for the new contracts will be the 1st October 2017. In order to maintain service continuity until this date, Policy Committee are asked to agree the extension of the existing grant arrangements, the current Family Choices contract and the existing refuge contract - in order to manage the transition this will step down in value in the lead up to the new contract starting.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 This proposal relates to the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
2. Providing homes for those in most need;

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Domestic Abuse Strategy was consulted on throughout 2015.
- 6.2 The proposal to rebalance investment in services, to reduce the overall budget and prioritisation of services within the new contract were subject to a public consultation between 11th of January and 10th of February 2017. Please see the main body of the report.
- 6.3 A consultation with potential providers was completed from 15th February to 3rd March 2017.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*
 - *eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - *advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
 - *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*
- 7.2 The Equality Impact Assessment completed in respect of this proposal is attached. This indicates that the proposal has the potential to have a disproportionate impact due to gender, as the refuge provision for those fleeing domestic abuse (which would reduce under this proposal) is solely for women.
- 7.3 Whilst a reduction in funding for refuge bed spaces is proposed, an increase in funding for non-accommodation based services is also proposed (through rebalancing investment and aligning costs with benchmarking). This will benefit more people (predominantly women and their children) seeking support and advice in relation to domestic abuse. It is difficult to appraise the net impact, particularly as refuge provision is part of a national network. Further, women fleeing domestic abuse may choose to present to a Local Authority as homeless to secure emergency accommodation either in preference to refuge or where this is not available.
- 7.4 There is also a concern that this proposal will have an impact on a specific racial group as the proposal means that the Council would reduce support funding to specialist Asian women's refuge (although still maintaining some provision). Asian women may be at risk as a result of so-called honour based abuse and forced marriage. In the interim, additional Government funding has been secured through a partnership bid as detailed elsewhere in this report.
- 7.5 The Council will ensure that all services procured are capable of supporting individuals from across ethnic backgrounds and cohorts with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Refocusing funding on peripatetic 1-1 and group support which is not tied to accommodation increases flexibility in meeting a wide range of needs across different communities and the capacity to respond to emerging needs. This changing emphasis and increase in non-accommodation based services could therefore have a positive benefit for those from other racial groups.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no statutory obligations to provide either refuge or support services for people experiencing domestic abuse.
- 8.2 The procurement for the new Domestic Abuse services will be completed in line with Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015. Paragraphs 4.21 and 4.25 detail the procurement routes for the accommodation based service and the non-accommodation based services respectively.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 These are covered in the body of the report. The change in the level of local authority funding, should the proposal be agreed, can be summarised as below:

	Refuge contract value	Non-accommodation based services contract value	Total
2016/17	£254,000	£186,000	£440,000
2017/18	£90,000	£255,000	£345,000

- 9.2 As explained above, the difference year on year in total funding is as a result of previously agreed reductions to grant/contract values and a further reduction as a result of this proposal of £58,000.
- 9.3 The contract value for refuge reflects the proposed reduction in the number of spaces funded (from 24 to 15) but also a reduction in the number of support hours per week in line with benchmarking against contracts in other areas (6 hours per week per household; 7.5 hours for specialist provision).
- 9.4 Reading Borough Council has also successfully submitted a partnership bid for short-term Government funding and £131,000 has been awarded, including £56,000 for additional specialist refuge places for the Thames Valley.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.

Appendix 1

Equality Impact Assessment

Proposed Changes to Funding for Domestic Abuse Services

Directorate: Directorate of Environment and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Community Safety

Name and job title of person doing the assessment

Sarah Tapliss, Service Development Officer

Date of assessment: 02-03-17

Scope of proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?

RBC currently (2016/17) has three separate contracts, funded by different service areas, for the provision of Domestic Abuse (DA) services in the town. These contracts total £384,000 and the largest contract covers the refuge provision, which is funded by the Housing Service (£254,000). The Housing Service also funds a grant of £56,000 to pay for Outreach support for those experiencing domestic abuse, drop-in arrangements and training.

New contract arrangements are due to be implemented in 2017 and the budgets across all services areas will be pooled to enable a single procurement exercise to be completed for all DA services. Previous budget decisions have already agreed a decrease in funding for 17/18 of £37,000, and this proposal looks to reduce the budget by a further £58,000. This will result in a total budget of either £403,000 (no budget cut) or £345,000.

As part of this process it is proposed that funding on Domestic Abuse services are rebalanced in line with the current Domestic Abuse strategy launched in November 2015. The specific amounts spent on different services will be finalised via the procurement process, however it is expected that RBC will reduce the funding for refuge provision to c. £90,000. This will enable any remaining budget, after the savings reduction has been applied, to be invested in non-accommodation based support for example, but not limited to, Outreach support, preventative activity and support to break the cycle of abuse. The non-accommodation based support budget would be £313,000 (no budget cut) or £255,000 depending on if the savings implemented. The total budget for non-refuge based services in 16/17 is £186,000.

Implications for refuge provision

There is reciprocal nature to DA refuge provision as the majority of those fleeing domestic abuse need to be accommodated out of area for their own safety. However, with LA finances under increasing pressure, a number of Authorities have reduced provision on the basis that it doesn't meet local need and have redirected funding to other priorities. This is creating a national shortage and there are calls for a national system to fund provision. Reading's contribution to the availability of refuge has been compared to other areas.

Reading currently has 25 refuge places in the town, which is significantly more per 100,000 population (16.1) than any other LA in the Thames Valley and also Southampton who were included in the benchmarking exercise. The average across the areas that provide any refuge spaces is 7.4 beds per 100,000 population, and across all areas it is 4.8. To be in line with the average Reading would be required to provide 11.6 refuge places or 7.5 refuge places depending on the comparison used.

As stated above, it is expected that the refuge budget will reduce from £254,000 to £90,000, a reduction of £164,000. This will result in the number of commissioned refuge beds in Reading reducing to c.15 (currently 24), 4 of which will be specialist refuge places for women from the Asian community (currently 7 are funded). The number of support hours for each of the households funded by RBC would reduce to an indicative 6 hours a week per household (currently 10), and 7.5 for the specialist resource based on benchmarking. This current proposal would mean that Reading would still be funding above the regional average number of refuge units.

This does not mean that the number of refuge places in Reading will definitely reduce, this is a matter within the control of the incumbent provider and the availability of alternative funding, only that the number commissioned by RBC with support funded by the Council will reduce.

The Council is not able to assess or comment on the overall national need for refuge beds.

Non - Accommodation based support.

This reduction in refuge would enable a rebalancing and shift of investment into non-accommodation based support, even with a reduction in overall spending. However, the amount of additional funding available for services will be dependent on the level of overall savings agreed.

Demand for Outreach services has increased significantly in the last 12 months, with the current provider receiving 464 new referrals in 2015/16, 152 of these were received in the last quarter of the year. The data for the first three quarters of this financial year indicate that the numbers of referrals are maintaining the level of Q4 last year, which would mean that, if demand continues at this rate, the full year figure would be c.600 new referrals. This increase in activity matches with those in other support areas such as Children's Social Care and the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). This level is not sustainable and measures are in place by the provider to prioritise referrals and ensure a safe delivery of their service.

This proposal seeks to increase funding for non-accommodation based services - outreach support, advice and information provision, preventative activity and training, as well as support to children and young people impacted by DA and for perpetrators and victims to break the cycle of abuse.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

The reduction in budget will provide savings to the Council, and the rebalancing of the remaining funding will enable more of the demand for non-accommodation based services to be met.

What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?

The reduction in budget for Domestic Abuse services is required in order to support the Council to deliver services within a significantly reduced budget. The re-balancing of funding is intended to meet a growing demand for non-accommodation based services whilst continuing to provide refuge spaces both to meet local need and to contribute to the national requirement.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Service users; potential service users; professionals/statutory and voluntary agencies working with those experiencing DA. The consultation completed indicates concern regarding sufficiency of refuge provision (or alternate safe accommodation and support) nationally for women and their children fleeing domestic abuse.

Assess whether an EqIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.)

Yes - a reduction in DA services will have a disproportionate impact on women as they are the main users of these services. The reduction in refuge numbers will also mean that the Council may no longer be able to commission a specialist facility specifically aimed at women experiencing abuse in the Asian community to the same level as currently. This does not mean that the number of specialist refuge beds will reduce, this is a matter for the existing provider, but the Council will no longer be able to guarantee that that this level of service will be available. This may have a disproportionate impact on Asian women seeking to access refuge (from outside of the Reading area generally).

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, and feedback.

Yes - nationally DA funding is a public concern.

If the answer is Yes to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Consultation

The changes proposed are in line with the Community Safety Partnership's Domestic Abuse Strategy. This was consulted on during 2015 prior to the launch of the strategy in November 2015.

A consultation was completed specifically in relation to the above proposal between 11th January and 10th February 2017.

All respondents were supportive of the increase in spend on non-accommodation based services and many recognised how a transfer of funding away from high cost refuge provision to preventative and Outreach services would be a positive approach to commissioning. However, nearly all respondents (120 online; c.45 face to face; 700 signatories to a petition; professionals feeding back) have raised concerns about the impact of a potential reduction in the number of refuges places available nationally - regardless of local need or who is funding the provision.

There is a clear recognition that there is inequity in levels of funding and provision of refuge places across Authorities and there is support for a national model of funding refuge provision to address this. Respondents stated that they believe that a reduction in refuge will result in more women and children staying in unsafe situations as they have no alternative safe accommodation to move to. Respondents may not be aware of the protections afforded by Homelessness legislation. Women fleeing domestic violence who may be unable (or may not wish) to access a refuge bed and don't have anywhere to live can apply to any Council for help as a homeless person. In most cases, that Council has to provide accommodation immediately while it makes enquiries into the household's situation and determines whether it has a duty to accommodate them permanently.

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users of Berkshire Women’s Aid services • Current providers of Domestic Abuse services in Reading • Paid staff and volunteers working in domestic abuse support across sectors • Staff in partner agencies, e.g. housing, benefits, police, social care • National domestic abuse service providers 	<p>Online consultation promoted directly and via the local press.</p> <p>Two face to face drop in sessions</p> <p>Two consultation sessions with service users</p>	<p>11th January 2017 - 10th February 2017</p>
---	--	---

Collect and Assess your Data

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

Describe how this proposal could impact on Racial groups

Commissioned domestic abuse services will be available to all racial groups, however, funding will be reduced for specialist refuge spaces for women experiencing abuse within the Asian community - resulting in a potential reduction from 8 to 4 beds. A further consideration is that Asian women may be at risk as a result of culturally specific issues of so-called honour based abuse and forced marriage. Asian women may not feel more comfortable accessing a specialist refuge for those with a similar cultural background.

The level of investment in non-accommodation based services will increase. Refocusing funding on peripatetic 1-1 and group support which is not tied to accommodation increases flexibility in meeting a wide range of needs across different communities and the capacity to respond to emerging needs. This changing emphasis and increase in non-accommodation based services could therefore have a positive benefit for those from other racial groups.

Is there a negative impact? Yes, potentially

The new procurement will reduce Local Authority funding for specialist Asian women’s refuge bedspaces from 8 to 4. This facility is the only one of its type in the Thames Valley and is predominantly utilised by women from other areas of the country.

This does not mean that these refuge spaces will close, the incumbent provider may choose to continue to run this provision via a different funding mechanism. However, RBC will no longer be able to guarantee the availability of the current level of provision.

Should this resource reduce, the lack of specialist refuge will have an impact on women from an Asian community nationally that do not feel comfortable accessing a refuge with people from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Refuge spaces will continue to be available to all women regardless of ethnic background and tailored support will be available to all residents of this provision.

Describe how this proposal could impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

Commissioned DA services will be available to all residents of Reading regardless of gender. However, Research shows that domestic violence is a deeply gendered issue that disproportionately affects women. For example:

- Metropolitan Police statistics show that male violence against women made up 85% of reported domestic violence incidents
- A 2009 study based on police reports, which accounted for the dynamics of domestic violence, found that only 5% of domestic violence incidents were perpetrated by women in heterosexual relationships
- Domestic violence is patterned, repeated behaviour intended to assert power and control over the victim. Of those who experience 4 or more incidents of domestic violence, 89% are women
- Four times as many women as men are killed by a current or former partner. Two women a week are killed as a result of domestic violence in England and Wales¹

Therefore any reduction in funding for Domestic Abuse services overall has a disproportionate impact on women.

Specifically this proposal expects to reduce the number of refuge beds available in the town and as these refuges are utilised by women only this will have a disproportional impact on one gender - predominantly women seeking refuge from out of area.

However, whilst a reduction in funding for refuge bedspaces is proposed (and an overall reduction in funding), an increase in funding for non-accommodation based services is also proposed (through rebalancing investment and aligning costs with benchmarking). This will benefit more people (predominantly women and their children) seeking support and advice in relation to domestic abuse.

Is there a negative impact? Yes

¹ <http://www.refuge.org.uk/about-domestic-violence/domestic-violence-and-gender/> - Accessed 17/2/16

Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability

Commissioned Domestic Abuse services will continue to be available to all residents regardless of disability. No disproportionate impact is anticipated.

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

Commissioned Domestic Abuse services will continue to be available to all residents regardless of sexual orientation, no disproportionate impact is anticipated.

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Age

Commissioned Domestic Abuse services will continue to be available to all residents regardless of age, no disproportionate impact is anticipated.

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief?

Commissioned Domestic Abuse services will continue to be available to all residents regardless of religious belief, no disproportionate impact is anticipated.

Is there a negative impact? No

Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you **MUST** assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

3. Negative impact identified or uncertain

What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?

As shown above the reduction of funding for refuge spaces does have the potential to have a disproportionate impact on women. However, whilst some reduction in funding for refuge bedspaces is proposed locally, an increase in funding for non-accommodation based services is also proposed (through

rebalancing investment and aligning costs with benchmarking). This will benefit more people (predominantly women and their children) seeking support and advice in relation to domestic abuse. It is difficult to appraise the net impact, particularly as refuge provision is part of a national network. Further, women fleeing domestic abuse may choose to present to a Local Authority as homeless to secure emergency accommodation either in preference to refuge or where this is not available (and in most cases would be eligible).

There is also a concern that this proposal will have an impact on a specific racial group as the proposal means that the Council would reduce support funding to specialist Asian women's refuge. In the interim, additional Government funding has been secured through a partnership bid for the Thames Valley. The Council will also ensure that all Domestic Abuse services procured are capable of supporting individuals from across ethnic backgrounds and cohorts with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act. However, refocusing funding on peripatetic 1-1 and group support not tied to accommodation increases flexibility in meeting a wide range of needs across different communities and the capacity to respond to emerging needs - this redistribution of funding and changing emphasis could therefore have a positive benefit for those from other racial groups.

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

There will be regular contract management and if a concern arises the situation will be reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Strategy group, a sub-group to the CSP.

Signed (completing officer)

Date

Signed (Lead Officer)

Date

Appendix 2

Domestic Abuse Services: Consultation Report - March 2017

Executive Summary

In light of the Council's financial situation the budget for the procurement of Domestic Abuse services has been reviewed and options for future commissioning within a reduced budget in this area have been considered. In line with the Community Safety Partnership's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18 and taking into account demand and benchmarking data (comparing levels of provision in Reading with other areas), it was proposed that there should be a shift in focus and funding away from support within refuges and towards non-accommodation-based preventative and outreach support services.

The Council ran a consultation in relation to this proposal between 11th January and 10th February 2017. This report provides an analysis of the feedback provided through the consultation.

Stakeholders had the option of taking part in the consultation by returning a survey - online or in paper copy - or by taking part in group discussions about the consultation issues.

120 online responses were received as well as a petition signed by 700 individuals protesting the proposed funding reduction. In addition two public drop-in sessions took place with a total of 13 people attending and two specific sessions with a total of 30 services users were held.

The majority of respondents to the consultation raised concerns about the impact of a potential reduction in the number of refuge places available nationally - regardless of local need or who is funding the provision.

There is a clear recognition that there is inequity in levels of funding and provision of refuge places across Local Authorities and there is support for a national model of funding refuge provision to address this.

There was also support for rebalancing funding across services in order to better reflect local need, however, many respondents stated that they believe that a reduction in refuge will result in more women and children staying in unsafe situations as they have no alternative safe accommodation to move to.

When responding to questions about priorities for future services there was a more varied response. The strongest theme of the consultation was that there is a need for a range of services from prevention activity in schools, crisis intervention and

support to break the cycle of abuse. None of the suggested services required for the town were outside of the scope of the proposed specification for services.

The following areas were seen as a priority for non-accommodation based support:

- Telephone support/helpline
- Outreach support (1:1 emotional support and practical support navigating services such as housing, benefits and legal support)
- Support for children and young people impacted by domestic abuse
- Training and support for front line workers to identify signs of abuse
- Support for perpetrators to change behaviour

Existing and former service users stressed the importance of group work to help talk through their situation and find the confidence to either leave an abusive relationship or avoid repeating the pattern in future relationships. The need for more education for young people to understand the risks of domestic abuse and what a healthy relationship looks like was considered a high priority also.

What we consulted on

Reading's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18 outlines Reading's focus for tackling domestic abuse over the three year period. Reading provides a good range of services and support for victims of domestic abuse. However, activity data indicates that the number of reported incidents of domestic abuse in Reading remains above average for the Thames Valley area. The strategy aims to continue to improve the offer for those experiencing domestic abuse and their families and deliver the best possible coordinated response to the challenge of domestic abuse in Reading.

The strategy identifies four key areas of focus:

- Encouraging people to seek support earlier - improving information, education and prevention.
- Providing the right response first time - improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.
- Having the right services available - improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change abusive behaviour.
- Understanding of the challenges in our town - improving data analysis and community engagement.

Reading Borough Council has a strong history of providing refuge provision in the town for those experiencing domestic abuse. There is a reciprocal nature to refuge provision as the majority of those fleeing domestic abuse need to be accommodated out of area for their own safety (locally 80% of refuge beds are accessed by women from outside the Reading area). However, with Local Authorities' finances under increasing pressure, a number of Authorities have reduced or ceased all provision on the basis that it doesn't meet local need and have redirected funding to other priorities. This is creating a national shortage and there are calls for a national system to fund provision.

In Reading, continued reduction in Government revenue support grant to Local Authorities coupled with rising demand has placed severe pressure on the Council's budgets. This has meant that although the Council has agreed just over £70m savings in the period 2010 to 2016, there is a continuing budget gap of £44m over the next three years. This presents a very significant challenge to the Authority and means that it is facing unpalatable decisions and unprecedented cuts to services.

Reading currently has 25 refuge places in the town, which is significantly more per 100,000 population (16.1) than any other LA in the Thames Valley and also Southampton who were included in the benchmarking exercise. The next highest is Milton Keynes who provide 11 units per 100,000 population. The average across the areas that provide any refuge spaces is 7.4 beds per 100,000 population, and across all areas it is 4.8. To be in line with the average (per 100,000 population) Reading would be required to provide 11.6 refuge places or 7.5 refuge places depending on the comparison used.

Recent activity data in relation to domestic abuse indicates a significant increase in referrals for non-refuge based support such as Outreach support, support through the Criminal Justice System and support to break the cycle of abuse. 2015/16 saw a 28% increase in referrals to BWA for Outreach services in comparison to the previous year and an equal increase were seen in the number of referrals to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which considers high risk domestic abuse cases. In addition, a number of support services within the Local Authority and wider partnership, for example Children's Social Care, have seen a significant increase in demand for services as a result of domestic abuse. In many ways this is a positive change, especially as Police crime reports have not increased at the same pace, as it indicates more people are seeking support, and seeking support earlier, to stop or reduce any domestic abuse they are experiencing. However, this increase in demand needs to be managed within challenging financial constraints.

Proposal:

In the context of the above, the Council consulted on a proposal to rebalance investment in commissioned provision in order to meet a growing demand. This would result in a reduction in the number of Council-funded refuge places from 24 to 15 (above the average level provided by similar Authorities) and a reduction in the funded weekly hours of support per household within those refuge places (in line with benchmarking data). This would enable an increase in the budget for non-accommodation based support services and would deliver a £58,000 saving against the total Domestic Abuse services budget. Combined with previous reductions that have been agreed, this would result in a total budget of £345,000, a 22% reduction in spend in comparison to the current 2016/17 budget for domestic abuse services.

The consultation asked residents and stakeholders their views on two main areas:

- Their views on the impact of the proposed reduction of Council funded refuge bed spaces, and
- Their priorities services to be commissioned in the future in Reading.

This was split between 9 separate questions. Demographic information was also captured to provide information about the profile of the respondents.

How we consulted

The consultation ran from 11th January to 10th February 2017. It was an open public consultation, with respondents encouraged to respond online but with opportunities afforded for group discussion including sessions run specifically for service users.

The consultation questionnaire (including a description of the proposal) was available on the Council’s website and in paper copy on request.

People could choose which parts of the consultation they responded to. Most people commented within each section, but many focused on the impact of the refuge reduction.

The consultation was discussed at 4 meetings (see table below).

Meeting	Number of people attending
Drop in session - 13 th January 2017	4
Consultation sessions with service users x 2	30
Drop in session - 10 th February 2017	9
TOTAL ATTENDANCES	43

A press release was issued at the start of the consultation which was picked up by both Getreading and the Reading Chronicle. Berkshire Women’s Aid (BWA) also committed to bringing the consultation to the attention of their service users.

Who responded

A total of 120 questionnaires were returned. In addition, verbal responses were collated from the 43 attendees at group sessions as per the table above. There may be some overlap between the verbal responses and returned questionnaires. A formal consultation response was received from BWA and an online petition titled ‘Don’t cut funding to Berkshire Women’s Aid’ was also created by a member of the public in response to the consultation, which has over 700 signatures.

More detailed demographic analysis is available only from those who responded to the consultation by returning a questionnaire and completing the ‘about you’ questions - which were optional.

People were invited to identify as residents; current or former users of services; family or friends of people who had used services; service providers; or professionals. Of those responding online 38% identified as a local resident, 21% identified as a current or former user of Domestic Abuse services (or their family member) and the remaining 41% of respondents were mainly professionals or volunteers working in domestic abuse services or related areas.

Of those with experience of services who identified their gender, 91% were female and 9% were male.

The age of the respondents is profiled below:

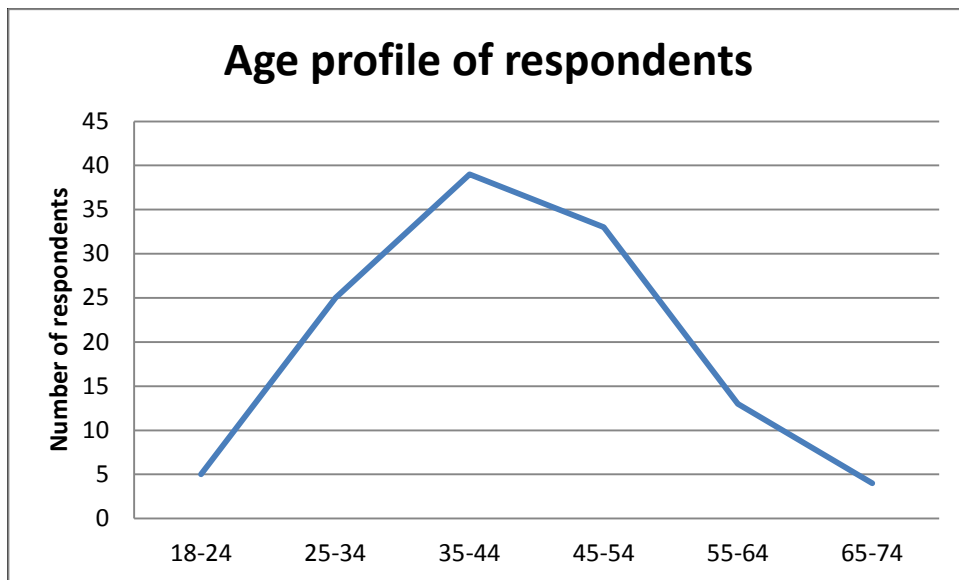


Figure 1: Responses from people online- by age bracket

Most of those with experience of services who responded were in the 35-44 age bracket, followed by the 45-54 bracket.

Across all returned surveys, 79% identified their sexuality as heterosexual or straight whilst 6% identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual and 15% preferred not say or didn't answer. 85% of the respondents defined as white British, 8% defined as being from another white background and only 7% define as BME. Across all returned surveys, 14% of people identified as having a disability of long-term illness.

Consultation feedback

Impact of reducing refuge provision (Q 1-3)

Respondents were asked to comment on the proposed reduction of Council funded refuge bed spaces in the town, including the proposed reduction of the specialist Asian women's refuge provision (from 8 to 4 bed spaces).

The majority of respondents to the consultation raised concerns about the impact of a potential reduction in the number of refuge places available nationally on the safety of women and children - regardless of local need or who is funding the provision. It was felt that people with additional vulnerabilities would have an increased level of risk.

It was recognised that the shortage of refuge provision was a national issue. There is a clear recognition that there is inequity in levels of funding and provision of refuge places across Local Authorities and there is support for a national model of funding refuge provision to address this. However, respondents commented that they were proud that Reading were providing more than others and felt that these services should continue.

There was also support for rebalancing funding across services in order to better reflect local need, however, many respondents stated that they believe that a reduction in refuge will result in more women and children staying in unsafe situations as they have no alternative safe accommodation to move to.

Respondents also highlighted that across the South-East a shortage of affordable housing, rising rents and sale values precluded many from sourcing their own housing solutions and increased reliance on emergency provision such as refuge.

Some respondents stated that they thought that the reduction in refuge provision would have a greater impact on public services (not necessarily in Reading), and therefore cost, as situations would escalate if women couldn't secure safe, emergency accommodation.

There was support for increasing spend on non-accommodation based services and it was suggested that this support would reach more individuals and hopefully reduce the need for refuge in the future at a local level.

There was a more mixed response in terms of the requirement for specialist Asian women's refuge provision. Many respondents were concerned that without a specialist provision women from the BME community would not approach services or access refuge. Others felt that all of the refuges should be able to cater for an individual's cultural needs.

Working well in Reading

The next question asked people to identify what they felt was working well in Reading. 77 people responded to this question online and it was discussed at the face to face consultation sessions.

The most common response was that the skill set of the existing service provider was very high and this led to positive experiences for service users and other professionals. People reported that strong and effective partnership work was

taking place in Reading and that there was high quality training for people working in the town.

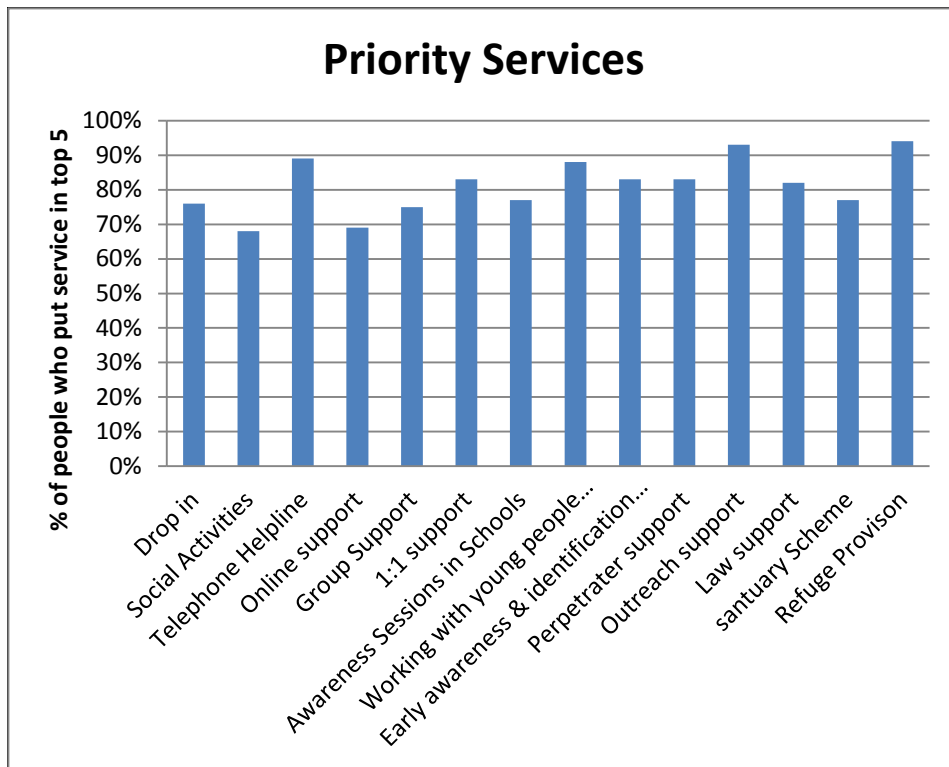
Many respondents stated the level of refuge provision provide was positive, but there was a strong message that all services were important and that it was the availability and connectivity of a range of services (including 1 to 1 support, group work and the helpline) that was effective. Service users also praised the ‘whole family approach’ that is commissioned in Reading, and that work was completed with children and young people that are also impacted by the abuse.

Services that should be prioritised

We asked people to tell us what services they would be most keen to see in Reading for people experiencing abuse, and we also asked them to complete a chart and tick the 5 areas they thought were most important. 101 online respondents answered this question.

The most common responses reiterated the need for refuge provision and the need for support at the point of crisis. People suggested a range of mechanisms for how people could access services. Consistently there was felt to be a need for people to be able to speak to trained, supportive workers who could provide immediate advice. Support to break the cycle of abuse was also cited as a necessary resource, and the need to be able to access legal support. Work in schools and with young people was again highlighted as a priority. However, the range of responses were extensive and many respondents stated that the existing spread of services met the requirements but increased capacity was needed. Nothing suggested fell outside of the Council’s proposed specification for services.

The table below shows the percentage of people that chose a service as one of their top 5 priorities.



The following areas were seen as a priority for non-accommodation based support:

- Telephone support/helpline
- Outreach support (1:1 emotional support and practical support navigating services such as housing, benefits and legal support)
- Support for children and young people impacted by domestic abuse
- Training and support for front line workers to identify signs of abuse
- Support for perpetrators to change behaviour

Existing and former service users stressed the importance of group work to help talk through their situation and find the confidence to either leave an abusive relationship or avoid repeating the pattern in future relationships. The need for more education for young people to understand the risks of domestic abuse and what a healthy relationship looks like was considered a high priority also.

General observations/ comments

We asked people to make any other comments or suggestions in terms of the domestic abuse services required in the town. Many respondents used this opportunity to highlight the need for national funding for these types of services, and to reiterate the importance of comprehensive services to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse. People also stated the importance of partnership working across all agencies, the need for consistent training and how this could be rolled out to community groups to make domestic abuse something that everyone is aware of and can help tackle.

The strongest theme of the consultation was that there is a need for a range of services from prevention activity in schools, crisis intervention and support to

break the cycle of abuse. It was felt that the priority should be ensuring that these services worked together to enable those that experience abuse, and those that perpetrate it, are helped with a cohesive wrap around service.