

REPORT OF: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES MANAGER

TO: EXECUTIVE

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Contact Details: Wayne Forrest
Tel. No: 01282 661044
E-mail: wayne.forrest@pendle.gov.uk

THE FUTURE OF PENDLE WOMEN'S REFUGE AND PENDLE DOMESTIC ABUSE ACTION PLAN 2016-2019

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Executive on possible options for the future of Pendle Women's Refuge following a soft market testing exercise and decisions by Lancashire County Council on funding for Refuges.

To also note the development of a new 3 year Pendle Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2016 - 19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To agree to a tender process being undertaken for future provision of Pendle Women's Refuge
2. To receive a further report after the tender process to agree the best option for future delivery of the Refuge
3. To note the new 3 year Pendle Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2016 - 19.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To fully explore the options for future sustainable provision of the Women's Refuge
2. The Council works closely with a number of agencies in tackling the scourge of domestic abuse within our Borough. This Action Plan builds on work undertaken within the 2012-15 Action Plan and sets out a program of actions for the period 2016-19.

THE FUTURE OF PENDLE WOMEN'S REFUGE

An Executive Report was submitted on 30th June 2016, to examine different ways of retaining Pendle Women's Refuge (PWR) should the decision be made by Lancashire County Council (LCC) to cease Supported People funding. LCC Cabinet has since received a report and determined on 8th September 2016, in relation to funding for women's refuges:-

- an annual budgetary provision from the Prevention and Early Help Fund (PEHF) of up to £1.25 million for domestic abuse services, comprising refuges, medium to high risk victim services and perpetrator services.

The budget allocation for refuges across Lancashire is anticipated to be in the region of £800k pa, which reduces the current allocation by approximately £70k pa. It is anticipated that LCC will negotiate a contract variation with the Council to bring current spend within the proposed budget and that value for money be maximised by encouraging service providers to work together more effectively.

Whilst this is positive news for PWR a number of questions remain unanswered by LCC ie:-

- 1) **How long will this funding be for?** No timescale has been given.
- 2) **How much will individual refuges receive?** Pendle currently receive £88,730 each year. Whilst it doesn't necessarily follow that all refuges will see a funding reduction at the same level, based on an overall funding reduction of c9%, the Refuge would see a funding loss of c9k pa.
- 3) **Are there any other conditions?** The Council would need to understand whether funding received is conditional, and if so, in what way.
- 4) **Can the funding be sub-contracted?** It is not clear whether the funding would be available if the Council secured another provider to deliver the PWR service.

Future funding of Supported Housing

There also remains uncertainty in relation to how supported housing, which includes refuges, will be funded in terms of securing rental income from residents. A Government written statement on 15th September 2016 confirmed:-

- The application of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to social rents from 2018 will be deferred for supported housing until 2019-20
- At this point, the Government will bring in a new funding model which will ensure that the sector continues to be funded at current levels, taking into account the effect of Government policy on social sector rents.
- It is an intention that from 2019/20 core rent and service charges will be funded through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit up to the level of the applicable LHA rate. This will apply to all those living in supported accommodation from this date. The Shared Accommodation Rate will not apply to people living in the supported housing sector.
- For costs above the level of the LHA rate, Government will devolve an amount of funding to local authorities to provide additional 'top up' funding to providers where necessary, reflecting the higher average costs of offering supported accommodation, compared to general needs. The 'top-up' will be ring-fenced and the amount will be set on the basis of current projections of future need. It is not known whether funding will be devolved to PBC or to LCC.
- Government will apply the rent reduction to supported housing, with rents in these properties decreasing by 1% a year for 3 years, up to and including 2019/20. The existing exemption for specialised supported housing will remain in place. It has not been confirmed as yet, whether the Refuge will be affected by this policy as it is managed by a local authority.

Although the position appears to be better than originally expected, the ongoing uncertainty is a risk to Pendle as the level of 'top-up' funding and how it will be administered is currently unknown.

The future of the Refuge - Options

At the time of writing the last Executive Report it was expected that the funding support from Lancashire County Council would cease in March 2017 and a number of Options were put forward for after that happened. Although PWR will continue to receive funding this is expected to be for a

limited period. Hence, it makes sense to continue to consider all options in relation to the future of the Refuge, to ensure its longer term sustainability.

The Options put forward to Executive in June were:

Option 1 – The Council continues to manage the Refuge

Following confirmation that LCC funding will continue, albeit assumed to be reduced, it is anticipated that funding would not lower to an extent that would make the continuation of management of the Refuge unfeasible in the short term.

Option 2 – The Council seeks an alternative provider to manage the Refuge

As agreed by the Executive, a soft market testing exercise was undertaken to ascertain whether there was a feasible option for an external provider to manage the Refuge. Whilst details of responses received cannot be reported in detail due to commercial confidentiality issues inc potentially being prejudicial to any future bidding process, it was concluded that:-

- There is a feasible option for an external provider to manage the Refuge
- A number of models could potentially be taken forward, subject to further work being done to understand the costs and benefits of the different models

Option 3 – The Council seeks ‘charitable status’ for the Refuge service

As per the previous Executive Report, it is recommended not to pursue this option.

Option 4 – Closure of the Refuge

As LCC have confirmed that future funding will be provided and that the soft market testing exercise concluded that there is a feasible option for an external provider to manage the Refuge, it is recommended to not seek closure of the refuge.

Conclusion

Funding from LCC will continue for a period of time (yet to be confirmed), albeit at a reduced level. This will give Pendle more time to fully assess the different options for provision of the Refuge in the longer term. The soft market testing exercise has shown that there is interest from external organisations in running the Refuge but a formal tender process will be required to fully evaluate this Option.

Therefore, in order to fully understand the potential offer from alternative providers, it is recommended that a tender process be undertaken and a further report brought back to the Executive after that process for them to agree which Option to pursue. The position will also be clearer regarding future funding from Supporting People by this time, thus Members will be in a more informed position to assess the different options.

PENDLE DOMESTIC ABUSE ACTION PLAN 2016-19

The Pendle Domestic Violence Action Plan 2012-15 (Appendix 1) has now become out of date. Notable success of the Action Plan include:-

- Launch and development of an ‘integrated service’ between the Council’s refuge and Pendle Domestic Violence Initiative (PDVI) which is located at the refuge building complex.
- Additional bespoke services for children at the refuge provided by the Emotional Health team, The Lookout and latterly via a successful DCLG bid for funding.
- Yearly domestic violence / abuse awareness raising events
- Bespoke training on domestic violence / abuse issues delivered
- Updating of web-based information and leaflets to promote services in place to tackle domestic violence / abuse.

- Awareness raising work in schools / colleges and via social media

Not all Actions from the 2012-15 Action Plan have been completed. Primarily, this is due to the fact that many Action are 'continuous' ie there is always a need to complete additional work throughout the life of the Action Plan eg in awareness raising work.

Following extensive consultation with agencies which are working in and around the borough in tackling domestic violence / abuse, a new refreshed Pendle Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2016- 19 (Appendix 2) has been developed and agreed by Pendle Domestic Abuse Forum. The document will remain 'live' and will be added to through the lifespan of the Action Plan.

It was also agreed at Pendle Domestic Abuse Forum that the Action Plan should use the wording '*domestic abuse*' rather than *domestic violence*. 'Domestic abuse' as terminology, is much more commonly used by agencies and recognises that the issue encompasses a much wider remit than violence itself. The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:-

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

IMPLICATIONS

Policy

There are no policy implications arising from this report.

Financial

The recommended tender process will further establish the financial implications of taking such a route and will allow more informed comparison to the current refuge service. There are no known financial implications for the Council as a result of the Action Plan.

Legal

There are no known legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

There is risk in relation to all options for the future of the Refuge. The recommendation would however allow for more informed decision making. There are no known risk management issues in relation to the Action Plan.

Health and Safety:

There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Sustainability:

The recommendation will allow opportunity to fully understand options from the tender process and lead to more informed decision-making when deciding the future of the Refuge. It is also hoped that by delivering actions contained within the Action Plan that this work will contribute towards community safety within the Borough and thus sustainability.

Community Safety:

There are no known community safety issues arising from proposed tender process for the Refuge. It is hoped that by delivering actions contained within the Action Plan that this work will contribute towards community safety within the Borough and thus sustainability.

Equality and Diversity:

There are no equalities issues arising from the proposed tender of the Refuge, unless a decision is taken to accept Option 4 - closure of the Refuge. In such a scenario, it would be recommended that a Service Impact Assessment be completed and considered as part of potentially reaching such a decision.

In terms of the Action Plan, domestic violence / abuse can potentially be suffered by anyone, regardless of whether the person has any specific protected characteristic or not. However, it is recognised that women are more likely to be at risk of domestic abuse than men and as such, delivery of this Action Plan is more likely to benefit women.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Pendle Domestic Violence Action Plan 2012–15 – Update Oct 15

Appendix 2 - Pendle Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2016 - 19