



Mayor and Cabinet

Approval to Procure: Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Community and Refuge Service

Date: May 2024

Key decision: Yes

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All wards.

Contributors: Violence Against Women and Girls Programme Manager
Senior Lawyer
Finance Business Partner

Outline and recommendations

Mayor and Cabinet are recommended to:

Grant approval to procure a new contract service to provide a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service, with a single point of access crisis management (including refuges), advocacy and support service for victims and any form of gendered based violence.

Approve the subsequent award of contract to the preferred service provider, provided the contract value is within authorised limits set out in the Part 2 report.

Delegate the decision to award the contract following the outcome of this process to Executive Director for Community Services (in consultation with the Director of Law, Governance and Elections and the Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure) in accordance with the award criteria published in the tender documentation and agree final form of contract.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

April 2020 - Contract awarded to Refuge for a 3 plus 2-year contract.

January 2023 - Proposal granted to extend current contract for one year until 31 March 2024.

December 2023 - Current contract extended for second year until 31 March 2025 was approved by Executive Director.

Procurement for the service has been considered by the Safer Communities Violence Against Women and Girls Programme Manager, the Safer Communities Crime and Violence Reduction Service Manager and the Head of Safer Communities.

May 2024 – Mayor and Cabinet approval to procure

Late Summer 2024 - Pre-market and Stakeholder Engagement

TBC - Approval to Award report

1 April 2025 - New contract to commence

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek permission to procure from Mayor and Cabinet to go out to tender 'single point of access' crisis management, advocacy and support service for victims of any form of gendered based violence. The tender will also include the management of specialist emergency refuge provision for women and their children fleeing abuse.
- 1.2 This report will also examine and consider the procurement options for the retendering of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service.
- 1.3 The current contract was awarded to Refuge in April 2020 for a 3 plus 2-year contract.
- 1.4 In January 2023, a proposal to extend the current contract for one year until 31 March 2024 was granted.
- 1.5 In December 2023, the Executive Director approved the extension of the current contract for a second year until 31 March 2025
- 1.6 On 31 March 2025, the lifetime of this contract will expire. Therefore Safer Communities are required to examine procurement options for a new contract

to commence 1 April 2025.

- 1.7 The estimated value of the contract for the scope of services is set out in the Part 2 report. The contract will commence on 1 April 2025 and run for 3 years with an option to extend for a further 2 years at the Council's discretion.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet:
Approve the procurement of a service to provide a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service, with a single point of access crisis management, advocacy and support for victims of any form of gendered based violence, with a total contract value as set out in the Part 2 report. The contract will be for a period of 3 years with the option to extend, for up to, a further 2 years from 1 April 2025.
- 2.2 Approve the subsequent award of contract to the preferred service provider, provided the contract value is within authorised limits set out at 1.3.
- 2.3 Delegate the decision to award the contract following the outcome of this process to Executive Director for Community Services (in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Governance and the Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure) in accordance with the award criteria published in the tender documentation and agree final form of contract.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1 This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):
- Cleaner and Greener
 - A Strong Local Economy
 - Quality Housing
 - Children and Young People
 - Safer Communities – Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy implementation
 - Open Lewisham
 - Health and Wellbeing
- 3.2 The London Borough of Lewisham (LBL) defines Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as any act that subjects, or places another in fear of violence, any act of violence, aggression and/or control, that seeks to take away the autonomy of another. The Council is committed to empowering those impacted by VAWG. The Council ensure that victims' experiences are validated and that

they are supported within the community. The Council recognise the impact of domestic abuse and VAWG upon communities, including the children that experience these crimes through their own lived experiences.

- 3.3 The Council's commitment to empowering and assisting those impacted by DA and VAWG is embodied in its 2021-2026 Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The VAWG Strategy implementation Plan has five key priorities to take this work forward; Prevent, Protect, Recover, Pursue, Partnership. The successful implementation of the 2021-2026 Strategy supports the Council's overall Corporate Strategy 2022-2026.
- 3.4 In particular, this report is closely aligned to the priority, Safer Communities.
- 3.5 In 2021, the government released the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; introducing statutory definition of domestic abuse to include economic abuse and controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse and coercion.
- 3.6 In January 2024, the Council published their Serious Violence Duty (SVD) Strategy. This demonstrates an important element in the review and refresh of the Public Health Approach to violence reduction (including DA and Sexual Offences), which Lewisham began in 2019 and will be relaunched in summer 2024, as it is essential to ensure that Lewisham is a safe borough for people to live, work and visit.

4. Background

- 4.1 Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) has been defined by the United Nations (UN) as "any act of gender-based violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or acts of violence which are suffered disproportionately by women." This includes physical, sexual and economic abuse, violence or sexual exploitation.
- 4.2 VAWG has many strands including domestic violence and abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, rape and sexual violence, stalking, harassment, prostitution and trafficking, and child sexual exploitation.
- 4.3 Although men can also be victims of violence, and the definition does not preclude this, research persistently shows the gendered nature of VAWG- that victims are disproportionately female and perpetrators male.
- 4.4 In April 2020, the Council contracted Refuge to deliver the VAWG provision within the Borough. The contract was set to expire on 31 March 2023 and had a two (2) year built in extension option which allowed the contract to be extended

on one or more occasions, at the Council's discretion, for up to 2 years.

- 4.5 The contract was extended in March 2023 for one year and then further extended until 31 March 2025.
- 4.6 During the pandemic, there was a global increase in reports of domestic abuse.¹
- 4.7 Sarah Everard's murder, who was killed by a serving police officer as she walked home in the neighbouring borough of Lambeth in March 2021 sparked a national debate and brought into sharp focus the everyday violence against hundreds of thousands of women and girls across the country. In July 2021, a report published by the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) determined that the UK was facing an epidemic of offending against women and girls and that a whole-system approach is needed to tackle it².
- 4.8 In June 2023, the UK Government labelled VAWG as a national threat, committing to a range of actions to protect women and girls against harm in strategies³ focused on tackling VAWG and Domestic Abuse (DA), introducing measures through legislation such as the DA Act 2021.
- 4.9 In London, tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a key mayoral priority within the Police and Crime Plan, and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) is dedicated to working with partners across London to address VAWG⁴.
- 4.10 Locally, the murder of Sabina Nessa, a Lewisham primary school Teacher in 2022, as well as other incidents of VAWG in the Borough where the victims have been assumed fatally harmed, but the remains were never recovered, has heightened the community's concerns around the safety of women and girls in Lewisham. Tackling VAWG and increasing feelings of safety in the Borough remain our priorities.
- 4.11 The London Borough of Lewisham have one of the highest rates of Domestic Abuse (DA) recorded in London. From December 2022 until November 2023,

¹ COVID-19 Lockdown and the Increased Violence Against Women: Understanding Domestic Violence During a Pandemic, Jinan Usta, Hana Murr, and Rana El-Jarrah, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., Vol. 8, Issue 3, August 2021

² <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/news-feed/radical-action-needed-to-tackle-crime-epidemic-against-women-and-girls/>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6194d05bd3bf7f054f43e011/Tackling_Violence_Against_Women_and_Girls_Strategy_-_July_2021.pdf

⁴ <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/news-feed/radical-action-needed-to-tackle-crime-epidemic-against-women-and-girls/>

the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) recorded 4172 DA Offences, which places Lewisham second in London for that period⁵.

- 4.12 It is therefore essential that Lewisham residents are provided with a service which will offer quality support to victims and survivors of all types of VAWG including DA, and work alongside Borough Officers to reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls.
- 4.13 Lewisham is committed to ending VAWG and supporting victims and survivors by providing them with a quality service.
- 4.14 With the noted high rates of Domestic Abuse within Lewisham, it is essential that by end of March 2025, a new contract is in place so support to victims and survivors continues seamlessly.

5. Procurement options Considered - Route to Market

The following options set out below were considered:

5.1 **Option 1** - Do nothing - Not recommended

The Council is committed to tackling VAWG in all its forms. Doing nothing will jeopardise current and future victims of DA and VAWG and will fall below the Council's high standards of delivering quality services to residents. Therefore doing nothing is not a recommended option.

5.2 **Option 2** – Bring the Service in-House - Not recommended

The option to bring this contract in-House was considered however, it is not a viable option, as the Council do not have the required expertise to deliver the service. Further, victims and survivors prefer to engage with an independent body, therefore insourcing could result in an increased risk of victims being reluctant to engage with a DA/VAWG Council provided service. Therefore bringing the service in-House is not a recommended option.

5.3 **Option 3** – Use of national frameworks - Not recommended No framework was appropriate.

5.4 **Option 4** - Open Market Tender Exercise - **Recommended**

Option 4 is the recommended option as it will allow Council Officers to test the

⁵ Data retrieved from the Metropolitan Police Crime Dashboard

market and what is on offer, and ensure the most capable provider is awarded the contract to deliver this most important service.

5.5 We propose to tender in the open market with an expectation that providers have a presence and links to Lewisham.

Officers are issuing a tender pack to include:

- Invitation To Tender
- Form of Tender
- Pricing Schedule
- Specification
- Method Statements
- Contract
- Sustainable Code of Practice for Contractors
- Social Value Key Performance Indicators

5.6 The tender will be open for 30 days to enable bidders to respond in sufficient detail to the proposals.

5.7 The evaluation of the tender will be split 45:45:10 between quality and price, in line with the evaluation criteria for awarding other contracts, with 10% allocated to social value.

5.8 The quality evaluation is tailored to this tender and comprises of various method statements, which all bidders will need to complete, detailing how they will deliver the service to the required standard and meet the specific needs of the intended client group.

5.9 Proposed procurement timetable is below:

Activity	Proposed Date
Present paper to Corporate Procurement Board	5 March 2024
Paper submitted to Executive Management Team (EMT)	27 March 2024
Mayor and Cabinet approval to procure	8 May 2024
Early Market and Stakeholder Engagements	Summer/Autumn 2024
Publish Tender Documentation on the Portal	TBC
Tender Closed	TBC
Tender Evaluation & Moderation	TBC
Contract Award	December 2024
Mobilisation period	January - March 2025
Contract Commencement	1 April 2025

5.10 Officers will undertake a number of engagement activities with service users within both the community and refuge service. This will include shadowing

service delivery, attending a peer support group and observing caseworker 1:1 meetings. Officers will also undertake a series of focus groups to talk directly to service users about their experiences of accessing the service and how they would like to see the service improved. This engagement will directly inform the service specification.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The available funding for the procurement of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service is made up of core General Fund budget, Grant funding from MOPAC as part of the London Crime Prevention Fund as well as Public Health Grant funding which is allocated to the service. The ongoing availability of the grant funding is subject to the continuation of this funding from the grant funding bodies and any changes to this funding would have to be factored into the future delivery of the contract.

7. Legal implications

Approval to Procure

- 7.1 The report seeks approval to procure an external service provider to provide a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service. Given the potential spend on this contract (at a length of 3 years with the option to extend for a further 2 years) this contract would be categorised by Contract Procedure Rules as a “Category A” contract. The report sets out the other options considered and explains why this is the recommended option.
- 7.2 Assuming that Mayor and Cabinet accepts the recommendation to procure a service provider, the Contract Procedure Rules (“CPR”) place requirements on how that should happen. The CPR require that when letting contracts steps must be taken to secure value for money through a combination of cost, quality and competition, and that competitive tenders or quotations must be sought depending on the size and nature of the contract (Rule 5). The requirements of the CPR would be satisfied by use of an open tender procedure. As a Category A contract, it would be for Mayor and Cabinet to take a decision on the award of any contract. Given the potential spend on this contract the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 as amended by the Public Procurement (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations (“the Regulations”) will apply.

Approval to Award

- 7.3 This report proposes that Mayor and Cabinet approve the award of a contract for a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Community and Refuge Service. This report further proposes that Mayor and Cabinet instruct the Executive Director for Community Services in consultation with the Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure and the Director of Law and Corporate Governance to give effect to this decision by applying the selection and award criteria to determine and enter into contract with the preferred contractor.
- 7.4 The decision to award the contract contained in this report is a Key Decision under Article 16.2 of the Constitution as it has a value of more than £700k. It is therefore required to be contained in the current Key Decision Plan and the Council's Key Decision procedure must be followed.
- 7.5 Provided that the final contract value is within authorised limits set out in the Part 2 report and the preferred service provider is selected in accordance with the selection criteria published in the tender documentation, then the selection by the Executive Director for Community Services of the preferred contractor in accordance with Mayor and Cabinet's direction will not be a Key Decision. For audit purposes a written record should be kept setting out how the selection process has been applied and the preferred service provider selected, and officers from Legal Services should be consulted as necessary throughout the selection and award process.

8. Risk Implications

- 8.1 Key risks and mitigating activities are contained in the table below:

Risk	Mitigation
The successful provider contractors fail to deliver the services	The Council will test the quality of the potential providers as part of the tender evaluation and will monitor the provider through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
The provider ceases trading or goes into administration/ liquidation	Appropriate financial checks will be undertaken prior to a contract being awarded. The Council will undertake regular checks on the successful provider's financial status and quality performance. Should an event occur, in the short-term, the Council would put an interim arrangement in place to ensure

	service continuity whilst a new procurement is carried out.
Cost of living crisis creating a bias towards low-cost bids	<p>Although it is always preferable to retain costs in lower levels, this should not impact on the quality of the service procured. The Council should consider the following when designing evaluation criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-market engagement to test that suppliers can deliver the required services at an affordable cost. • The approach to evaluating quality, including objective criteria that are relevant to the service requirement, weightings applied according to the importance of the criteria and a scoring approach that promotes effective differentiation

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Council's Single Equality Framework for 2020-24 will provide an overarching framework and focus for the Council's work on equalities and help ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.
- 9.2 A complete Equalities Analysis Assessment (EAA) will be conducted during the year as part of the re-commissioning exercise.
- 9.3 A significant proportion of our residents have a first language other than English or do not have a household member who speaks/reads English. Therefore any communications need to take account of this.
- 9.4 A significant proportion of our residents are ethnically diverse. The new contract will need to be culturally competent and ensure that support is offered to those communities "seldomly heard from".

10. Climate change and environmental implications

- 10.1 The Service will be expected to comply with the Council's Environmental and

Climate Change requirements, so as to minimise the environmental impact of the service.

10.2. The Service will also be expected to support the Council's commitment to making the Borough carbon neutral by 2030

11. Crime and disorder implications

- 11.1 The contract will aim at preventing or reducing the impact of violence against women and girls and those suffering gendered based violence by providing the necessary support. Providers also offer interventions that aim to reduce the fear of crime and violence, assisting victims and survivors to rebuild their lives free from the fear of violence, thus promoting community cohesion.
- 11.2 The management of the caseload may involve a variety of cases such as domestic violence and abuse, rape and sexual assault, trafficking etc.
- 11.3 Officers will seek to ensure the successful tenderer has a proven impact in reducing levels of VAWG amongst service users.
- 11.4 Reducing VAWG is a key priority for the Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan 2023-2024. The Partnership seek to address local issues including antisocial behaviour, hate crime, domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, substance misuse, violence, and re-offending.

12. Health and wellbeing implications

- 12.1 The contract will positively impact the health, mental health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.

13. Social Value implications

- 13.1 Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires that the council considers, before commencing a procurement process, how wider social, economic and environmental benefits that may improve the wellbeing of the local area can be secured.
- 13.2 The London Borough of Lewisham Social Value Policy for Procurement sets out the legal and strategic and policy context for social value and the approach the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL) will adopt to deliver social value through commissioning and procurement activities.

- 13.3 Social value refers to extra economic, social or environmental benefits that can be attached to a contract. It is about ensuring that for every pound the London Borough of Lewisham spends, as much value as possible is achieved for local people.
- 13.4 The Council is an officially accredited London Living Wage (LLW) Employer and is committed to ensuring that, where appropriate, contractors and subcontractors engaged by the Council to provide works or services within Lewisham pay their staff at a minimum rate equivalent to the LLW rate. The successful provider will be expected to meet LLW requirements and contract conditions requiring the payment of LLW will be included in the service specification and contract documents.
- 13.5 The successful provider will be expected to submit a Social Value Action Plan to demonstrate their commitment to Social Value through the delivery of the programme.

14. Background papers

- 14.1 None

15. Glossary

Term	Definition
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
LLW	London Living Wage
DA	Domestic Abuse

16. Report author(s) and contact

- 16.1 Vicky Rapti
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Programme Manager
vicky.rapti@lewisham.gov.uk
- 16.2 Comments for and on behalf of the Executive Director for Corporate Resources (Financial Implications)
Chris Goddard - Finance Business Partner
Chris.goddard@lewisham.gov.uk
- 16.3 Comments for and on behalf of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance (Legal Implications)
Mia Agnew - Senior Lawyer
mia.agnew@lewisham.gov.uk