

PFCC Decision Report

Report reference number: 189-23

Classification: Not protectively marked

Title of report: Domestic Abuse Services Recommissioning 2025 Onwards

Area of county / stakeholders affected: Countywide

Report by: Greg Myddelton (Strategic Head of Partnerships and Delivery)

Date of report: 14 December 2023

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report seeks endorsement of the direction of travel and overarching principles for the recommissioning of domestic abuse (DA) support services beyond the current contract end date of end of March 2025.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the PFCC endorses the proposed approach to domestic abuse commissioning from April 2025 and agrees in principle to PFCC funding being included within the scope of a jointly commissioned domestic abuse procurement process (as detailed in paragraph 9.1 below).

3. Background to the Proposal

- 3.1. In preparation for the expiry of the existing domestic abuse victim service contract at the end of March 2025, commissioners from the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) partnership commissioned a DA Discovery research project to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of people who have been affected by domestic abuse (see decision report 79-22). This discovery project identified that the existing partnership structures, the single front door, and the core DA support services for victims were all strengths of the current system and identified an opportunity to align different contracts and deliver a whole system approach to domestic abuse.

- 3.2. The PFCC has joined other local commissioners in a task and finish group exploring what greater alignment around domestic abuse could mean, and what benefits it might deliver. Other commissioners include the three upper-tier local authorities, the Probation Service, health partners and Essex Police.
- 3.3. The PFCC currently jointly commissions domestic abuse services with Essex County Council and a countywide Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) service with Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council. These contracts are scheduled to expire at the end of March 2025.
- 3.4. The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) brings together relevant partners from across local authority (including public health, social care, and education), criminal justice and emergency services with the purpose of preventing, reducing and responding to domestic abuse.

4. Proposal and Associated Benefits

- 4.1. The PFCC and SETDAB partners intend to use the impending re-procurement exercise to address some challenges and opportunities identified during the Discovery project. These include embedding lived experience in our service design and delivery, improving our offer to marginalised groups, improving awareness of coercive control, and scaling up our offer to perpetrators.
- 4.2. Commissioners have been meeting as a task and finish group since the conclusion of the discovery work. In addition, there have been stakeholder workshops and workshops with those with lived experience of abuse. The model emerging from that work retains the focus on a single central point of contact (currently referred to as Compass, our one front door), expanded to include services for perpetrators as well as victims, and offers local services segmented for adults, those in need of refuge, families / children and perpetrators. This single umbrella model, incorporating services for perpetrators and victims, should allow for a greater level of engagement with perpetrators, clarity for referrers, and consistency for those self-referring. Within the central point of contact it is proposed to retain a triage function where victims are assessed to determine their risk and identify a suitable and appropriate action plan, including allocation of IDVAs, referral to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Team (MARAT), and self-serve resources as appropriate.
- 4.3. Commissioners are proposing a joint commissioning approach which pools budgets and integrates elements into a combined service offer. This is similar to the model that the PFCC currently deploys with Essex County Council, but would broaden to include Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, and also to incorporate perpetrator activity and early help family work. It is worth clarifying that the scope of this contract would be limited to support service provision, so

some elements of the DA offer, for instance local MARAC arrangements, SETDAB team, and partnership communications would be out of scope.

- 4.4. The current proposal is for a lotted contract so that elements of the service could be delivered by different organisations, but within a wider, joined-up system. The lotting is still subject to finalisation, but the current intention is to have a lot for the central point of contact, three geographic lots (covering North, Mid, and South Essex) for specialist victim support, a lot for early help, and a lot for perpetrator services. This allows specialist, local, and smaller agencies to engage in the exercise more easily than a single, large, combined tender.

5. Options Analysis

- 5.1. Commissioners have considered many different options in developing this model. By focusing on the findings of the Discovery project, commissioners are seeking to retain what works well within the current model and enhance it to address gaps and areas of opportunity.
- 5.2. When exploring commissioning options, Commissioners have considered different models such as individual and unconnected contracts for each element of the service or aligning (but not integrating) contracts. It is believed that combining the service offer will be more appealing to the market, encouraging greater engagement and competition from providers as well as allowing smaller, local organisations to engage; will give commissioners and senior sponsors greater oversight of the whole DA system; will ensure consistency and clarity for victims and referral agencies, and will achieve economies of scale from a procurement, monitoring and contract management perspective.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1. Extensive consultation has taken place in developing this model. There were three workshops held in 2023 for those supporting individuals impacted by domestic abuse to capture the feedback of those with lived experience, including children, perpetrators and adult victims / survivors. Four stakeholder workshops were held in June 2023 to report back on the Discovery exercise and begin to shape the future model. 180 participants from across the partnership took part in these sessions. A further two workshops were held in October to consult stakeholders on the emerging model and explore whether this was faithful to the feedback given earlier in the year. The SETDA Strategic Development Group and SETDA Board have been kept up to date on progress at each stage of this work.
- 6.2. This proposal was discussed at the PFCC's Senior Management Team meeting on 5th December 2023.

7. Strategic Links

- 7.1. This work will support delivery of the PFCC's responsibilities in the Victims' Code of Practice, the commitments in the Police and Crime Plan, and those laid out in the partnership SETDAB Strategy.
- 7.2. This holistic approach also supports delivery of the objectives in the Independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner's 2023 report "A Patchwork of Provision" which highlighted a "postcode lottery" of support services and issues of access for those from minoritised groups. By implementing a countywide integrated model with a central point of contact, we will maximise engagement and provide consistency across the county.

8. Police operational implications

- 8.1. Essex Police has been fully involved in the development of this model, represented by Supt. Matt Cornish. Essex Police will be key referrers into the support service.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1. Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from this decision report at this stage, the PFCC is asked to make an in-principle commitment to pool their domestic abuse commissioning budget of £451,000 per annum from the Victims Fund and £75,000 per annum perpetrator match-funding from the Community Safety Fund (with the option to include any further funds made available from the Ministry of Justice or Home Office) with other commissioners to create an Essex-wide domestic abuse commissioning joint fund. The £451k funding comes from the PFCC's annual Ministry of Justice Core Victims' grant (£2.2m in 2023-4). We have funded this contract from that grant since 2016. The £75k is a transfer from our Community Safety Fund to a DA perpetrator fund. We have made this contribution for the last few years since we developed the Columbus and Change Hub models.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. A partnership agreement will be drafted for agreement which will outline the terms of the joint working relationship.
- 10.2. The future service will be subject to an open procurement process and contractual terms.

11. Staffing implications

- 11.1. The PFCC will continue to support the development of this model. The PFCC will be jointly responsible for ensuring the effective delivery of the new contracts via robust performance and contract monitoring.

12. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion implications

- 12.1. The Commissioning Discovery project identified support for minority groups as an area that the partnership could improve. To that end, commissioners are seeking to use this opportunity to enhance our community in-reach capabilities through the new contracts and to ensure we reflect the lived experience of minoritised groups in our service design and contractual arrangements. This includes the experiences of male victims / survivors, those from the LGBT community, and minority ethnic groups.
- 12.2. The contracts will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

13. Risks and Mitigations

- 13.1. There are inherent risks with this proposal. A jointly commissioned approach relies on partners' priorities and outcomes aligning now, and in the future, and on budgets being predictable and protected over the term of the contracts. It relies on consistency in the strategic approach to domestic abuse across Essex, and on commissioners working effectively together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. These risks are mitigated somewhat by a formal partnership agreement and contracts. It should also be recognised that the PFCC, Essex County Council, Southend Council and Thurrock Council have successfully been jointly commissioning an IDVA service since 2016 in a model which has been independently identified as good practice.
- 13.2. The Ministry of Justice has not yet confirmed our victims' core funding allocations for 2024-5 or beyond meaning there is a risk that funding is not available to support this process. This risk is acknowledged, but not regarded as likely. If the MoJ withdraws the victim core grant the PFCC would be unable to support this collaborative work.

14. Governance Boards

- 14.1. Both the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board and its Strategic Development Group have been kept apprised of the developments of this project since its inception.
- 14.2. The PFCC approved the funding for the local Discovery project via decision report 079-22.
- 14.3. This proposal was discussed at the PFCC's Senior Management Team meeting on 5th December 2023.

15. Links to Future Plans

15.1. This work supports the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan as well as the partnership SETDA strategy and the recommendations of the DA Commissioner's 2023 "Patchwork of Provision" report.

16. Background Papers and Appendices

16.1. n/a

Report Approval

The report will be signed off by the PFCC’s Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer prior to review and sign off by the PFCC / DPFCC.

Chief Executive / M.O.

Sign:

Print: P. Brent-Isherwood

Date: 2 January 2024

Chief Financial Officer

Signing delayed due to considerations relating to MoJ funding not yet being confirmed and the associated risks and mitigations to be included as a consequence

Sign:

Print: Janet Perry

Date: 22 March 2022

Publication

Is the report for publication?

YES

NO

If ‘NO’, please give reasons for non-publication (Where relevant, cite the security classification of the document(s). State ‘None’ if applicable)

None

If the report is not for publication, the Chief Executive will decide if and how the public can be informed of the decision.

Redaction

If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

1. Of Decision Sheet? YES
NO

2. Of Appendix? YES
NO

If ‘YES’, please provide details of required redaction:

N/A

Date redaction carried out:

Chief Finance Officer / Chief Executive Sign Off – for Redactions only

If redaction is required, the Treasurer or Chief Executive is to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign:

Print:

Chief Executive / Chief Finance Officer

Decision and Final Sign Off

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign: 

Print: Roger Hirst

PFCC

Date signed: 22/03/2024

I do not agree the recommendations to this report because:

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Sign:

Print:

PFCC/Deputy PFCC

Date signed: