



OFFICER DECISION RECORD

This form should be used to record Executive decisions taken by Officers

Decision Ref. No:			
Service Area:	Housing & Communities	Date:	6 June 2024
Contact Name:	Tracey Kybert	Tel No:	01202 093740
E-mail:	tracey.kybert@bcpcouncil.gov.uk		
Subject:	The decommissioning of Bournemouth Women's Refuge		
Decision taken: To decommission an 18 unit women's refuge delivered by a commissioned service provider in line with the strategic plan for Safe Accommodation for those fleeing Domestic Abuse.			
Reasons for the decision: <p>Government guidance requires local authorities to effectively commission services based on a local strategy informed by a robust needs assessment. Local authorities are required to consider the specific accommodation-based support needs of all victims in its area, including those with particular protected characteristics, and/or multiple complex needs. Relevant safe accommodation includes refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, second stage accommodation or other accommodation designated by the local authority, registered social landlord or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation.</p> <p>An independent assessment of local domestic abuse provision took place in 2021 and has formed the basis of commissioning plans which are being taken forward through the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group and as part of a wider programme of commissioning of accommodation and support based services.</p> <p>Services for victims of Domestic Abuse will be recommissioned within the next 12 months. Meanwhile, in view of the fact that the Bournemouth Women's Refuge is not effectively meeting the original commissioned need and owing to increasing costs of these services in the short term, decommissioning will ensure the remaining Poole refuge service and other support-based services, can continue. In the longer term this means we will be able to mobilise our new commissioning plans which will increase the quality of accommodation and choice to meet the needs of families fleeing domestic abuse.</p>			
Background: <p>BCP Council and Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) have agreed to decommission the Bournemouth Women's Refuge which provides shared accommodation and support for 18 families/individuals.</p> <p>The service accommodates families temporarily who require settled housing inside and outside the BCP area. The remaining Poole refuge will ensure there is refuge accommodation (18 units) available to meet the needs of victims who are in receipt of a statutory duty from BCP Council and require this type of accommodation.</p>			

At any one time BCP Council will have victims of domestic abuse receiving services who will be accommodated in their own homes with target hardening safety measures, refuge accommodation, other housing related supported accommodation or temporary accommodation. Ahead of our recommissioning programme victims will continue to access all these options.

The council has a robust strategy to acquire additional self-contained temporary accommodation, which will be available for victims to move to with dedicated support. However, we will not be assuming the running of a dedicated refuge as per the provision which we are decommissioning from BCHA.

The Domestic Abuse Outreach service supports victims who are in temporary accommodation and the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group have agreed to fund a dedicated domestic abuse support worker to increase this provision.

Government guidance requires local authorities to effectively commission services based on a local strategy informed by a robust needs assessment. Local authorities are required to consider the specific accommodation-based support needs of all victims in its area, including those with particular protected characteristics, and/or multiple complex needs. Relevant safe accommodation includes refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, second stage accommodation or other accommodation designated by the local authority, registered social landlord or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation.

An independent assessment of local domestic abuse provision took place in 2021 and has formed the basis of commissioning plans which are being taken forward as part of a wider programme of commissioning of accommodation and support based services. A recommendation of this report was to 'decommission the Bournemouth Women's Refuge and replace with commissioned dispersed accommodation providing the same number of spaces.' The report further recommended 'Commission Poole refuge as a female only refuge with 24-7 staffing to support residents with higher levels of need.'

The objective therefore is to provide a mixed model of accommodation which will include greater access to self-contained, dispersed accommodation, respite rooms and refuge provision with an emphasis on self-contained. Support will be provided as part of this provision and will result in a marked improvement in the local offer and outcomes for those families and individuals who are displaced as a result of domestic abuse.

A procurement exercise will take place later this year to commission new services based on this national good practice model, the local needs assessment and feedback from stakeholders and service users.

The Bournemouth refuge building is old and configured in a way that means families have to share accommodation. This means in some cases families cannot be accommodated owing to their needs and risks or they may refuse the accommodation resulting in voids. The proposed recommissioning plan for dispersed self-contained accommodation with support will mean families no longer need to share and larger families, males, people with mobility issues and other needs will be accommodated safely.

As part of annual contract negotiations, pending the wholesale recommissioning exercise, the provider of the Bournemouth Refuge, BCHA, has requested a 17% uplift for both Refuges to continue with the current model. This in addition to requested increases for other services cannot be achieved within the current financial envelope.

An alternative option of reduced staffing would have meant the service ran a high risk of further voids as a number of our families and individuals require a level of support that

would no longer be delivered. This would have resulted in an increase in the use of temporary accommodation with a continued commitment to the funding of a service that did not meet the needs of presenting families and individuals.

The new 24/25 contract for Poole refuge only will release £25,000 of the original budget by the time the decommissioning has taken place. Whilst this service is not being decommissioned to make savings, this funding will contribute to other supported housing service increases for 24/25 and be included in the core budget for the domestic abuse commissioning programme going forwards.

The Bournemouth Women's refuge will be decommissioned from 30 July 2024. The current occupiers will be provided with an offer of alternative accommodation with appropriate support;

- Every family or individual has an allocated Housing Officer to work with them to move on to suitable alternative accommodation.
- Weekly meetings with Housing and BCHA to ensure move on plans, staff consultation and redeployment is on track.
- Families and individuals will have access to assistance including rent deposits to move into private rented accommodation, social housing, priority for alternative supported accommodation as needed.
- 5 staff are at risk of redundancy from this service. BCHA are working with these employees to find them alternative positions within the organisation. They have 5 vacancies within the domestic abuse service area and new contracts coming on line so are confident they will be able to retain the staff and minimise redundancies.
- A Handling Plan sets out the communications strategy for both BCHA and BCP Council staff, service users, press enquiries and the general public.

Options considered:

Do nothing – Additional resources are required to sustain the service. There is no allocated budget in 2024/25 to fund the level of uplifts requested. The provider has indicated they would need to reduce staffing or close the service if a negotiated uplift was not provided.

Provide additional uplift resources to maintain service offer

The Council has made budget provision available in 24/25 and onwards through the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to uplift supported housing contracts to which inflationary increases have not been applied for many years. Despite this investment, an additional £44,000 (17%) has been requested by the provider to continue the service across the two refuges. The service no longer meets the needs of families/individuals in terms of the quality, layout and facilities of the accommodation and the service experiences voids as a result. Maintaining the status quo would not provide good value for money or support the Councils commissioning plans for this needs group.

Continue the service with a reduced level of staffing

This will have an impact on the level of needs the service can support, the quality of support delivered and potentially increased voids as a result of not being able to accept the vulnerable people the service currently accommodate. These additional risks are high and therefore not recommended.

Decommission both services

Supporting the implementation of a decommissioning plan will ensure resources are prioritised for supported housing services which better meet local needs and support wider recommissioning plans.

The recommendation to decommission the Bmth refuge and retain the Poole refuge recognises the value in having a range of supported accommodation options for families. For some the existing refuge provision will meet their needs. The recommissioning plan to provide a range of self-contained accommodation options with support will ensure BCP Council can meet the identified needs of families including:

- victims/survivors with higher levels of need due to mental ill-health and substance use
- larger families
- victims/survivors local to BCP who do not want to flee the area but cannot safely access refuge, including older victims
- male victims
- victims needing accessible accommodation
- others who are unable to be accommodated in a shared building

Consultations undertaken:

As part of our obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 our most recent safe accommodation needs assessment carried out by Standing Together identified that this refuge was not fit for purpose and the Council needed to re-provide more bespoke and flexible accommodation to meet the needs of families and individuals with a range of needs.

A key part of the safe accommodation needs assessment was capturing the voices of people with lived experience seeking support for domestic abuse. Case studies and interviews were evaluated and feedback incorporated into the report findings and recommendations.

Stakeholder sessions with Adults & Childrens Commissioning, Communities and Children's Social Care colleagues have been carried out to discuss the changes put forward by the service provider and the subsequent negotiated changes agreed with the service provider.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulation has been consulted.

Finance and Resourcing Implications:

Funding identified:

Additional funding not required. The new 24/25 contract for Poole refuge only will release £25,000 by the time the decommissioning has taken place. Whilst this service is not being decommissioned to make savings, this funding will contribute to other service increases for 24/25 and support the Domestic Abuse recommissioning programme starting later this year.

Financial risks:

There is a risk that the reduction in units may initially result in an increase in spend on temporary accommodation. However, planning is in place with Housing and BCHA to support people into long term accommodation options or alternative supported housing ahead of the closure.

Value for Money assessment:

The contracts team continue to monitor the remaining services and apply market testing as part of the recommissioning programme.

VAT implications: N/A

Name: Adam Richens

Date: 23 May 2024

Signature (of Chief Finance Officer): 

Legal Implications:

By virtue of Section 57 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2017

(1) Each relevant local authority in England must—

(a) assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based support in its area,

(b) prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and

(c) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

(2) For the purposes of subsection [\(1\)](#)—

- “accommodation-based support” means support, in relation to domestic abuse, provided to victims of domestic abuse, or their children, who reside in relevant accommodation;
- “relevant accommodation” means accommodation of a description specified by the Secretary of State in regulations.

(3) A relevant local authority that publishes a strategy under this section must, in carrying out its functions, give effect to the strategy.

It is noted that the most recent assessment identified the Bournemouth site as not fit for purpose. BCP must take this into account when carrying out its functions.

Appropriate legal advice has been provided.

Name: Janie Berry

Date: 4 June 2024

Signature (of Monitoring Officer): 

Risk Assessment:

If the change is not made the following risks are possible:

The proposed changes submitted by BCHA would have resulted in a budget deficit in 24/25, other contracts would have ended or been reduced without agreement. The Bmth & Poole refuge provision could not have continued to provide a robust, safe service with the suggested reduced staffing model. The proposed change we have agreed safeguards the remaining refuge at the correct level of staffing and limiting the overall impact across other services.

The reduction in units may initially result in an increase in spend on temporary accommodation. Planning is in place with Housing and the provider to support families/individuals into long term accommodation options or alternative supported housing ahead of the closure.

In retaining the refuge provision BCP Council would not be working to the recommendations within the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment in meeting the needs of women fleeing domestic abuse. We would not be following the feedback from service users and stakeholders or taking into account national best practice.

Name: Tracey Kybert

Date: 6th June 2024

Signature (of Officer Completing Assessment):



Impact Assessments:

Note: Equality Impact Assessment

Information for publication/not for publication

Note: This information is for publication.

Background Papers

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

Standing Together Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment



BCP Needs Assessment Report.d

[BCP Preventing Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023 | BCP \(bcpcouncil.gov.uk\)](https://bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

Any declaration of interest by the Officer responsible for the decision	Nature of Interest
No	N/A

Note: No Officer having an personal financial interest in any matter should take a decision on that matter. Other interests of a non-disqualifying matter should be recorded here.

Any conflict of interest declared by a Cabinet	Name of Cabinet Member	Nature of interest	Details of any dispensation

Member who is consulted by the Officer taking the decision			granted by the Monitoring Officer
Yes/No			
Decision [REDACTED]			
[REDACTED]			
Date of Decision: 6th June 2024			
Date Decision Effective: 6th June 2024			
Date of Publication of record of decision: (to be inserted by Democratic Services)			

Note: A record of this decision should be kept by the Service Area within which the decision falls.