

Forward Plan reference number: FP/135/08/21

Report title: Decision to adopt and publish Essex County Councils Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy	
Report to: Councillor Beverley Egan, Cabinet Member for Children and Families	
Report author: Chris Martin, Commissioning Director – Children and Families	
Date: 19 th October 2021	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Clare Burrell, Head of Strategic Commissioning and policy Clare.burrell@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1. The Everyone's Essex Plan has four priority areas that are underpinned by twenty key commitments that will make Essex a stronger County. One of these commitments is to improve the safety of Essex residents, which includes addressing domestic abuse.
- 1.2. Domestic abuse is under reported, does not discriminate, and affects people regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio economic status, sexual orientation, or background. We want victims and survivors of domestic abuse to feel and be safe and have support to recover from the trauma they have experienced.
- 1.3. There is a new duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 on the Council to make provision for victims of domestic abuse living within safe accommodation. The new legislation will strengthen the work the Council already does to tackle domestic abuse and will contribute to the commitment to improve the safety of Essex residents.
- 1.4. This paper is seeking agreement to adopt and publish a new Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning strategy that sets out our intentions until 2024.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to adopt and publish the Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 in the form as appended to this report.

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DA Act) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. This new Act placed a statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation, which includes their home, where appropriate safety measures are in place. The overarching aims of the Act are to:

- Protect and support victims
- Transform the justice process
- Improve performance across agencies
- Promote awareness

3.2. Essex County Council (The Council) was awarded grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing Communities (DLUHC) under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support with fulfilling the functions of the new statutory duty (3.3 below). The expectation is that local authorities will work towards implementing the duty as soon as practicably possible.

3.3. The DA Act put in place a statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of DA and their children residing within safe accommodation. The Council is required to appoint a multi-agency Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LPB) to support in performing certain specified functions that are:

- Complete a needs assessment
- Prepare and publish a strategy by 27th October 2021
- Give effect to commissioning/de-commissioning
- Monitor and evaluate the strategy
- Report back to central government in June 2022

3.4. In accordance with the duties as set out within the DA Act, a LPB was convened on the 5th May 2021, a needs assessment completed, and a strategy prepared.

3.5. The needs assessment involved several activities including:

- Desktop research regarding support for both adult and child victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- Collation and analysis of data from the 12 Essex district housing authorities on those presenting as homeless because of domestic abuse
- Consideration of the key findings of the Essex Police domestic abuse problem profile 2021
- Collation and analysis of data from the three domestic abuse organisations in Essex on the presenting needs and demographics of victims and survivors and the demand on their safe accommodation
- Service and pathway mapping with domestic abuse service providers to identify the support currently in place and where there are potential gaps
- Case studies and interviews with victims and survivors of domestic abuse to understand their experiences of support

3.6. Several stakeholder engagement sessions were delivered and attended by; police, voluntary and community organisations, education, health, domestic abuse providers, housing, adults and children's services, adult and children's mental health providers. The engagement sessions shared insights, provided opportunities for review and feedback and helped to shape the outcomes within the strategy.

3.7. Comment and review of the strategy was sought from the Council's Family Leadership Team and Adults Leadership Team, the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board members and the Councils Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board members.

3.8. Overall, the feedback on the proposed strategy was positive and the content well received. There was one point of clarification regarding data, which was amended to reflect the needs assessment. One DA provider raised the Parental Relationships Spectrum, which is referenced in the strategy, and how it intersects with domestic abuse. The spectrum is part of the Essex healthy relationships work and the points raised will be addressed through the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Parent Reference Group.

3.9. The Strategy will be evaluated against a monitoring and evaluation framework, which is currently being finalised.

3.10. The Strategy has been drafted and it is proposed that the Council publishes the Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 as set out in Appendix 1. The Strategy has five key objectives.

3.10.1. Children and young people residing in safe accommodation can access support that meets their needs

3.10.2. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access support to improve their psychological and emotional wellbeing and recover from trauma

3.10.3. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will have improved access to safe accommodation through good quality information, advice and guidance

3.10.4. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will be better informed of their legal options

3.10.5. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will play their part in the co-design and decisions on provision, and influence the wider domestic abuse agenda in Essex

4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

4.1. This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision

- Enjoy life into old age
- Provide an equal foundation for every child
- Strengthen communities through participation

4.2. Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030:

- There are no direct environmental or climate change implications on this decision.

4.3. This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':

- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- A high-quality environment
- Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
- A good place for children and families to grow

5. Options

5.1. Option 1 – Do Nothing

Doing nothing is not recommended. The Council has a statutory duty to publish the Essex Domestic Abuse Strategy by the 27th October 2021.

5.2. Option 2 – Publish the Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 as set out in this report: **preferred option**

6. Issues for Consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 Aligned to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 the Government allocated the Council funding of £2.763m for 2021/22. The proposed DA strategy is consistent with the aims as set out in the spending plan as agreed in the Council decision ref: FP/069/05/21 which outlines how this resource will be applied to support victims of domestic abuse, including children.

6.1.2 The funding received by the Council is a one-year funding settlement to the 31st March 2022. Current commissioning intentions only commit funding up to this date pending the receipt of future funding settlements.

6.2. Legal implications

6.2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. This Act places a statutory duty on Essex County Council in respect of support for victims of domestic abuse, including children.

6.2.2 The Council is under a statutory duty to prepare and publish a commissioning strategy for the provision of support to be provided to victims of domestic abuse.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that ‘marriage and civil partnership’ is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

8 List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Domestic Abuse Strategy
Appendix 2 - EQIA

9 List of Background papers

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Cllr Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance <i>(on behalf of Councillor Beverly Egan, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Early Years)</i>	22/10/21

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Executive Director, Children and Families	21/10/21
Helen Lincoln	

Executive Director, Finance and Technology (S151 Officer) Stephanie Mitchener on behalf of Nicole Wood	19 October 2021
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer) Susan Moussa on behalf of Paul Turner	18/10/2021