

West London Strategic Review of Domestic Violence

Appendix 2

1) Executive Summary -

1.1 Introduction

This Strategy is concerned with SP funded housing-related support services for people experiencing domestic violence and takes a pragmatic approach to issue resolution.

Most cases of domestic violence occur where violence is done by men towards women. And for many, domestic violence is a significant contributor to their becoming homeless. Many women stay in abusive relationships for a long time and it is only when the violence has increased that help is sought.

Domestic violence cuts across the responsibilities of a large number of organisations and there are a variety of statutory duties associated with the response. For support services the main intervention priority is to increase the safety and protection of women and children. Housing related support may be just one of a variety of responses.

Access to a service may be needed immediately and the victim may move. Nationally there is insufficient refuge provision for women but this is not something that this Strategy on its own can address.

It has proved difficult to secure hard data for the review but advantage has been taken of relevant publications.

1.2 The current situation in West London – SP funded services

In 2005/6 the seven West London SP AAs in total spent £2,587,448 on local housing related support services for women experiencing domestic violence – 3.9% of the grant spent in the sub-Region. The following services are present:

Refuges - 129 units

Other accommodation-based services – 48 units

Floating support – 166 units

Resettlement/Outreach – 6 units

The most common age of those commencing services was 31. For every 100 service users there were a further 85 dependants - though 34% of users had no dependants. 19% of users had a recorded secondary support need. Mental health or 'complex needs' featured most significantly.

The cost of services range from £8 to over £400/unit/week. The hourly rate varies from £4 to £32. Several services had high staff: service user ratios. In practice staffing levels ranged from 55 - 128%.

There have been high levels of accommodation use. Many of those rejected by refuges were housed in temporary LA accommodation.

Local issues identified by Providers and Service Users are:

- issues around women presenting with complex needs
- the problem of women with no recourse to public funds
- refuges not accommodating households with older boys

Service Users said that they valued the range of provision and particularly specialist support and accommodation-based facilities. They saw the most important support need to be services for children, support in accessing work and support for women with mental health problems; or alcohol or drug use problems.

1.3) Services other than housing-related support.

SP-associated services to people experiencing domestic violence include:

- housing-related support services not funded by SP
- telephone advice
- drop-in services
- Sanctuary schemes
- Telecare-type services
- other welfare services

1.4) Current Plans

A West London SP Strategy was produced in 2005 and identified a need for a strategy specific to people experiencing domestic violence. Since, individual AAs have made their own plans to meet the needs of those experiencing domestic violence – and many of these have been implemented.

Each Authority has a separate Strategy and an Action Plan just for domestic violence.

1.5) Issues:

West London authorities spend more on domestic violence services for women than elsewhere in London and a case can be made for less spend on this sector in the sub-Region. If a no-change Strategy were to be agreed there would be a risk that:

- services would not be strategically relevant
- services would be inconsistent
- there will be gaps in service that should be able to be met

Referrals can come from a wide range of sources. Whilst not SP funded, a variety of services are necessary to tease out the need for housing-related support.

With a wide range of prospective individual disabilities that women experiencing domestic violence just might present with, there are difficulties in planning for them.

There are particular issues for very young women who may find access to and exit from housing-related support services more difficult. Most refuges will accommodate sons only up to early teenage.

Local Authorities have a Gender Equality Duty. The case for dedicated adult male provision did not appear to be evidenced though there may be a need for some limited provision for gay men.

In London over a quarter of contracts for housing related support to those experiencing domestic violence are for BME women. However local evidence suggests that additional dedicated services are not a high priority. But there is support for more focused provision.

Many women not able to make recourse to public funds are refused access to services.

There is evidence of unmet need for women experiencing mental health problems; also those with drug or alcohol issues. However it appears that some Providers could more successfully accommodate women with complex needs. Research into and prioritization of unmet needs, and how in particular they are best met by supported accommodation, is an area requiring some further work.

The appropriate general service response for people experiencing domestic violence – accommodation-based provision versus floating support or specialist versus generalist support for example - is not clear. A number of housing-related support services are accommodation based. Several big problems can arise if these are changed. This builds in a presumption to retain accommodation-based services in their current accommodation. There are aspects of accommodation

that can make for more successful service provision. There appears to be scope to introduce more telecare.

Funding from statutory sources can well-compliment housing-related support services – eg for children’s work and therapeutic interventions.

Some Users seem to be residing in accommodation-based support for a long time and there are move-on issues. Service Users need clear and realistic timescale expectations of refuge residence. Floating support should normally be delivered in the expectation that it is only short-term.

There may be a case for particular local service configurations.

Strategies and Plans regarding those experiencing domestic violence are not well-linked.

1.6) Future projections

The Building for All model suggests that in West London there is under-provision of supported accommodation but it does not calculate local over-provision. More work is needed by individual authorities in order to fine-tune the model. Some individual authorities have particularly large dedicated floating support services.

There is a concern that when SP becomes integrated into Local Area Agreements non-local need will not be given appropriate recognition.

1.7) Generating and assessing strategic options

It was thought that:

- there is some limited need for more accommodation-based provision
- there should be less floating support
- there is scope to secure reduced expenditure
- better move-on would increase performance

It was noted that rapid contract changes can lead to sector instability.

1.8) The strategy

- the West London Administering Authorities are committed to recommissioning floating support provision in the Sub-Region and the purchase of one cross-authority service, with local bases
- there is a geographical imbalance in the distribution of housing-related support provided by floating services and the opportunity will be taken in future commissioning plans to address this. This may be addressed by

individual boroughs considering the extent to which they access the new floating support service

- there is evidence of a need to commission a new or remodelled refuge for women with complex needs with sub-regional access. Due to the length of time an accommodation based service would take to procure, we will investigate whether the need can be met in the shorter term via the new floating support service
- in due course all accommodation-based services will be recommissioned as several groups of services; consideration will be given to joint tender with Childrens Service funding
- minor local change to supported accommodation, including refuges, is encouraged where the intended change will make the property more fit for purpose and it is strategically relevant. Examples include meeting house in multiple occupation standards and asset remodelling priorities,
- more supported accommodation should be made available for those with wheelchair or mobility needs.
- more services to those without recourse to public funds are encouraged, with a particular focus on move-on solutions
- all refuge service users should be expected to move-on within 12 months of residence; within six months from the point of being established as ready for it
- signposted by SP staff as needed, Providers will be encouraged to secure non-SP funding for the more regular welfare activities that they provide – for example children’s activities and counselling; more so as delivery of the Supporting People programme is increasingly aligned with other LAA priorities – for example community safety.
- efficiency savings should be secured through better deployment of staff at Administering Authority’s individual services
- given that there is a wide range of unit costs in the sub-Region, new cost parameters for services to women experiencing domestic violence will be determined. And to inform this, further work will be undertaken on benchmarking service’s value for money
- as delivery of the Supporting People programme is increasingly aligned with other LAA priorities local domestic violence strategies and plans are expected to be more joined-up with local SP strategies and plans; and the LAA should consider taking on more responsibility for funding services that compliment housing-related support services
- the SP Administering Authorities are committed to joint-working to ensure that plans for those experiencing domestic violence embrace the dimension of service provision that meets needs other than those are best met locally. Examples include women’s need for accommodation located away from the perpetrator of violence and specialist provision designed to meet the needs of women from more than one Borough.
- standard core specifications should be written for all modes of delivery of housing related support services for people experiencing domestic violence

- the further appropriateness of telecare type services should be explored
- arrangements should be in place to respond quickly to those presenting with needs associated with a sensory disability
- separate BME responses, particularly dedicated provision, should be the exception
- there should be further scrutiny of what happens to those not accepted by SP-funded services
- Providers should be expected to secure timely move-on accommodation for tenants; resettlement should be offered for no more than three months
- there should be more effective reciprocal arrangements between individual West London authorities.

1.9) Taking the strategy forward

A need for new work-streams arises if the Strategy is agreed. A new council Project may be the most efficient means of implementing many of them.