

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: REGULATORY

1. DECISION TAKEN

- 1.1 To enter into a contract with Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) for the provision of a specialist service for victims of domestic abuse in the district.

2. DECISION TAKER

- 2.1 Ian Fullstone, Service Director – Regulatory

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

- 3.1 20 April 2021

4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 SADA has been funded by the Council to provide an advice and support service for people experiencing domestic abuse in the district since November 2019 and the existing contract ended in March 2021. There is an ongoing need for this service, with additional pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.2 SADA is a locally based provider of support services and emergency accommodation for households suffering from domestic abuse and is best placed to provide a fully joined-up service for the district. The specialist function provided by SADA is embedded in the Council's housing service, being co-located and sharing the Council's housing software.
- 4.3 The service will be fully funded by Homelessness Prevention Grant funding received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Approval for the allocation of this funding was agreed under delegated authority by the Service Director for Regulatory Services in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health on 10 March 2021.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None. There is no alternative local service provider who could provide this specialist provision and who, crucially, are also able to provide access to emergency accommodation, a critical resource when assisting households fleeing domestic abuse.

6. CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)

- 6.1 The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Gary Grindal, the Deputy Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Sean Prendergast and Cllr David Levett have all been consulted and are supportive of this decision.

7. FORWARD PLAN

7.1 This decision is not a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

8. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council has a legal duty to assist households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including in instances where it is not reasonable for households to continue to occupy accommodation because this might lead to domestic abuse or other violence against themselves or their family.

8.2 The Domestic Abuse Act has just been passed; amongst many other additions, all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse will automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance and will therefore be owed the full housing duty by the local authority.

8.3 Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) was established by Stevenage Borough Council and the Council has commissioned them since November 2019 to provide a specialist service for local people experiencing domestic abuse and these arrangements ended March 2021.

8.4 The SADA service is open to men and women and provides valuable specialist support, advice and crisis intervention - including emergency accommodation – and is embedded in the Council's housing service. All clients, on approach to the Council and suffering or at risk of domestic abuse, are referred directly on to SADA for triage and subsequent advice and support as appropriate. SADA are responsible for carrying out all aspects of casework, including at a multi-agency level, although cases are referred back to the Council to lead on if the client becomes homeless and a relief duty is triggered.

8.5 Instances of domestic abuse have soared nationally during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of 2020/21 to date, the Council's housing team has made over 180 referrals to SADA. About one quarter of cases have been resolved following advice from SADA. A further 30% of cases have received further, in-depth support ranging from the sourcing of alternative accommodation options, to ongoing support to return home, the provision of emergency accommodation or intensive multi-agency involvement to re-build lives.

8.6 Temporary accommodation in the district is normally fully occupied and is currently significantly over subscribed; the SADA service reduces both the demand for these units as well as the potential risk of hotel placements that are both inappropriate for the household and costly for the Council.

8.7 SADA is a local, specialist provider of support and emergency accommodation for this vulnerable client group and as such is best placed to provide effective homelessness assistance. Many cases involving domestic abuse are complex and require a multi-agency approach to ensure the delivery of effective client led support. The nature of such cases means that a sensitive approach and accurate and up-to-date knowledge of, and access to, available local support is paramount. Crucially, SADA also has access to its own emergency accommodation and has sixteen such 'Safe Space' units across Hertfordshire, including two in North Herts. These provide fully furnished emergency accommodation for up to seven days to victims, survivors and their families. SADA now operates across Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield, North Herts and East Herts areas.

8.8 This decision awards a three-year contract to SADA in order to continue the existing support, accommodation and assistance service for victims of domestic abuse in the district until 31 March 2024.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Under delegated decision making arrangements, the Service Director for Regulatory Services, in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, agreed on 10 March 2021 that £50k of MHCLG homelessness grant could be allocated to SADA in order to provide the funding required to extend their service for three years. This was publicised in the Members Information Service on 12 March 2021.
- 9.2 The new three-year contact with SADA commenced on 1 April 2021. The required contractual considerations have been delayed due to ongoing workload pressures directly caused by the pandemic. Following an application for retrospective approval completed by the commissioning officer, a single tender procurement was agreed on 19 April 2021 by the Service Director: Resources and Service Director: Legal and Community in accordance with Section 14.3 of the Contract Procurement Rules.
- 9.3 Paragraph 14.3 of the Contract Procurement Rules states:
- 14.3 In the event that approval has not been obtained for a single tender in accordance with section 14.2, and a contract has been awarded, the Service Director: Resources and the Service Director: Legal and Community may grant retrospective approval provided the following conditions are met: (i) Expenditure is within approved budgets or overspend has been reported (ii) Contract award was approved under Section 14 of the Council's Constitution (Responsibility for Functions) (iii) The Service Director: Resources and the Service Director: Legal and Community are satisfied that an application for a single tender would have been approved under section 14.2. (iv) The commissioning officer completes an application for retrospective approval to the Service Director: Resources and the Service Director: Legal and Community.*
- 9.4 The total value of the proposed contract for three years does not equal or exceed the applicable threshold under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 therefore the contract does not need to be competitively tendered.
- 9.5 The decision in this report meets the MHCLG requirements for use of the ring-fenced grant and is also consistent with the aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy (2019-2024) that has a specific focus on actions regarding the prevention and management of homelessness.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The total cost for the three-year SADA service is £50k. This funding has been provided by the MHCLG and is ringfenced for use in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness. Its use was agreed under delegated authority by the Service Director for Regulatory Services in conjunction with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health on 10 March 2021.
- 10.2 There are no specific capital implications.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Victims of domestic abuse require specialist support and the SADA service provides timely interventions, dedicated resources and a variety of housing options to achieve this.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment,

victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 12.2 This initiative is specifically designed to assist a select group of people, those suffering from, or at risk of, domestic abuse. This client group arguable contains some of the most vulnerable in society.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this decision.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no human resource implications.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 The MHCLG’s Homelessness Prevention Grant:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-further-310-million-to-tackle-homelessness>

17. APPENDICES

- 17.1 None.

NOTIFICATION DATE: 6 May 2021

Please Note: that *unless urgency provisions apply* EXECUTIVE decisions cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.

Call-in does not apply to NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS