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Subject: Review of Leeds Domestic Violence Service Contract

1. Purpose and Background

This report reviews the performance and quality of the Leeds Domestic Violence Service (LDVS) in order to inform the decision-making process around extending the contract. The service started on 1st April 2017 and the initial contract period will end on 31st March 2022. There is provision to extend the contract for up to 36 months.

The contract was awarded in 2 lots – Community-Based Support and Emergency Accommodation. The annual contract value is £885,898 (£636,976 for Lot 1 and £248,922 for Lot 2). The total cost of the extension is £2,657,694 over the three year extension period.

This review provides an overview of the work and progress of the LDVS service and considers whether to recommend extending the existing contract. It is structured around the themes of the framework used to monitor quality of our services, namely well-led, performance, safe, effective and client involvement.

2. About Leeds Domestic Violence Service (LDVS)

Leeds Domestic Violence Service (LDVS) is a citywide service which works with people and families, offering emergency accommodation, support, advice and advocacy.

LDVS is a partnership of 3 specialist services: Leeds Women's Aid (lead partner), Behind Closed Doors and Women's Health Matters. It provides a range of community-based services, including emergency supported housing, IDVA (independent domestic violence advocate) support, community outreach support, a 24 hour telephone helpline, drop-ins and support groups.

3. Contract Management

There is a robust contract management process in place which involves regular meetings and communication between LCC and managers from Leeds Women's Aid, and the wider partnership. Quarterly contract meetings take place to oversee performance, quality and service development.

4. Service Review

4.1 Well Led

The three consortium partners, Leeds Women's Aid (LWA), Behind Closed Doors (BCD) and Women's Health Matters (WHM) have a Consortium Agreement in place which details the responsibilities of each of the partners, financial procedures and conflict management. Through this document, LWA, the lead partner, ensures all partners are consistent in standards and governance arrangements.

The three partners hold regular meetings attended by senior management, trustees and team leaders. All 3 organisations have robust governance, health and safety, and risk management policies and procedures.

The management team support a number of key partnership meetings which are instrumental in driving forward the domestic abuse agenda in the city, including:

- Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board
- Domestic Homicide Sub-group
- Front Door Safeguarding Hub (FDSH) Operations Meetings
- Clare's Law Panel Meeting
- Honour Based Abuse Steering Group
- Leeds Domestic Abuse perpetrator task and finish group
- DAVA Forum (Domestic Abuse Voice and Accountability)

The management has responded positively and effectively to changes on both the local level (e.g. introduction of the new Daily Risk Assessment Meeting (DRAM) model) and national level (e.g. helping build up the ideas for how to make best use of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) grant which came into the city in 2021).

4.2 Performance

Emergency Accommodation

The emergency accommodation element of the service has 25 self-contained units – 11 within the refuge building and 15 dispersed properties. These units are always full and there is high demand for this provision. As with other commissioned supported housing services there are challenges around clients being able to access appropriate move-on accommodation, resulting in clients staying longer than was anticipated when the service was commissioned. This is impacting on the number of new clients accessing the service and LDVS is working closely with colleagues from both Commissioning and Housing to try and address these challenges.

The refuge supports children and young people – there are specialist CYP support workers on the staff team – working closely with Children's Social Work Service and local schools.

The refuge strives to be a welcoming and accessible place for people from all communities – is mindful of specific cultural requirements and brings residents together to celebrate religious and cultural events.

Community-based support

As with the emergency accommodation, demand for the community-based service is high, with all support elements working at full capacity. Referrals into the service have been consistently over 600 per quarter and the number of people being supported at any one time averages around 330.

The majority of referrals are from MARAC/DRAM, Police and Children's Social Work Service; In the last full year of provision (2020/21) referrals were received from over 50 different sources, highlighting how wide reaching and vital the service is within the city.

The 24 hour helpline is receiving increasingly high numbers of calls and the service was successful in securing temporary funding from the Ministry of Justice to fund an additional worker in order to be able to respond to this. In the first year of the contract there were 4,696 calls to the helpline and this increased to 6,225 in 2020/21 – a 33% increase.

All elements work closely together to make sure that people are able to move easily across the various support options.

Client Outcomes

Over the course of the contract to date, on average 86% of clients report feeling safer on exiting the refuge. 86% reported feeling better able to recognise abusive behaviour, 85% reported understanding more about the impact of abuse on their children, and 76% reported having improved support networks.

Quotes from clients who have received support from the service:

- *"[LDVS worker] helped me understand that there was no shame in being a man who'd suffered abuse."*
- *"I feel able to bear things better and have more support around me. I wouldn't talk to anyone before. [LDVS worker] helped me open up. I was then OK to tell my sister about my situation and she is now supporting me."*
- *"Getting the support gave me the confidence to go through with things which I may not have done without the support. Having support going through the civil court process knowing I wasn't on my own dealing with this and having someone that understood how things worked and could explain it to me was brilliant. It was good to have someone to be able to contact in times of crisis when I wasn't sure what to do for the best. It was really good having that person."*
- *"I was supported from the moment I called 999. I feel like you had my back. I felt held. From start to finish. You gave me strength. For an entire year you supported me and helped me to safety."*

Case studies received from the service highlight the holistic approach the service takes to supporting individuals within the service. Two anonymised case studies are included in section 5 of this report.

4.3 Safe

LDVS places great importance on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of both clients and staff. There are a range of processes and practices in place that demonstrate good practice in this area.

All partners have policies and procedures in place to safeguard both vulnerable adults and children and a procedure in place for reporting safeguarding issues. There are a range of training opportunities for staff on safeguarding issues which are well taken up and rolled out throughout the three organisations.

Before anyone is admitted into refuge a full assessment of risk, including details of the perpetrator and the dynamics of current residents, is carried out alongside those for the client to ensure safety for residents and staff.

There are clear risk assessments in place and staff visiting individuals within their homes have also had risk assessment training. The service quickly updated risk assessments in light of COVID-19 and guidance from the government.

Information about incidents is communicated appropriately within the service as well as with LCC Commissioners and LCC Social Care.

4.4 Effective

Robust monitoring enables the service to demonstrate its effectiveness. The service has invested in a bespoke contract management system which allows them to record all qualitative and quantitative information. The system is used daily by workers, so the service is always able to provide current data and information.

At the end of support, LDVS carries out an assessment to ensure all support needs have been covered, a final risk assessment is carried out to confirm a reduction in risk and a final 'Power' form completed to measure the end of the journey ('Power' forms are completed at the start of support and at various points throughout support). Client feedback forms are given to the service users and collated onto the database.

One of the key strengths of LDVS is how effective the service is at assessing risk and also the needs and requirements of individual clients. This commitment to comprehensive assessment is reflected among all partners and the strong partnership working ensures that individuals often benefit from a range of different elements of the service.

4.5 Client Involvement

LDVS has a Consulting and Involving Clients policy which sets out how they employ a variety of approaches to consultation. They refer to data that has already been collected from client feedback forms and other sources of informal feedback. The service carries out specific consultation exercises using, for example, structured questionnaires, telephone interviews, focus groups, or a combination of these as appropriate. Examples include focus groups in refuge to get client views on:

- what they want from a worker, this has led to staff not wearing organisational identification when supporting clients at individual meetings etc.
- what they want from a garden (in preparation or a funding bid to get new gardens and play areas)
- activities they would like whilst in refuge, parties, trips, cooking sessions, information sessions etc. The feedback demonstrated that residents wanted more activities for themselves such as jewellery making, sewing machines have been purchased for residents and more local activities sourced.

Staff have completed 'Better Conversation' training which means they are able to fully personalise assessments and have collaborative discussions with clients about need.

Participants are able to provide feedback via forms which are completed and returned after service. Feedback is almost universally positive but on the very few occasions a client has expressed some level of dissatisfaction - and they are identifiable - the service has acted to resolve the issue alongside the client. LDVS receive compliments regularly and these are anonymised and shared with commissioners.

5. Case Studies

Case study 1: Jane (not her real name) was supported by the IDVA Team in conjunction with the LDVS Refuge Team and LDVS Support Groups. Jane began support while staying in our Refuge and attending the LDVS Support Group following abuse from her ex-partner.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, Support Group sessions could not be held in the same format, but service users were offered remote one-to-one sessions with the specialist group worker. During these sessions, Jane formed a trusting relationship with her support worker from LDVS Support Group. Jane disclosed escalating abuse including stalking, physical, sexual and emotional abuse from her ex-partner who had also found her refuge location and put her at increased risk.

The Support Group worker immediately supported Jane to report this abuse to police and liaised with relevant agencies and LDVS Refuge Team to initiate safeguarding for Jane. The LDVS Refuge team worked efficiently to safely move Jane to a different refuge location with 24-hour staffing and security. This disclosure of ongoing abuse was also referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and resulted in Jane receiving support from the LDVS IDVA Team through the criminal justice proceedings.

LDVS IDVA, Refuge and Support Groups Teams worked closely together to provide support and information to Jane while respecting her personal boundaries and avoiding overwhelming her with calls.

At this time, Jane was pregnant. She had previously had children removed from her care due to risks of being exposed to domestic abuse, so she and her LDVS key workers were especially conscious to support Jane however possible to enable her to keep the new baby in her care. This included her Refuge support worker liaising with and attending meetings with Children's Social Work Service and advocating for the client's capability and responsibility as a prospective parent. Jane's IDVA also advocated for her by ensuring that Jane and her solicitor were aware of the criminal justice outcomes and Jane's willingness to support prosecution.

Jane was supported to give evidence against the perpetrator at trial and this built her confidence and self-esteem. Although the outcome of the criminal court case was not what she would have wished for, Jane and her LDVS workers felt that her attendance at trial was a personal victory. Despite several years of high-risk abuse, she had never supported a prosecution previously, so this event marked a turning point for Jane.

At the time of closing her case to LDVS, Jane was residing with her baby and felt proud to be safer and more independent than she had been for many years. Jane was bonding with other mothers and forming secure support networks with peers. She also felt more confident to access support from LDVS in future should she need anything further.

Through support from LDVS IDVA, Refuge and Support Groups, Jane has gone from being assessed as extremely high risk of serious harm or homicide, to being assessed at medium risk of further abuse.

Case Study 2: Barry* (not his real name) was supported by LDVS in a dispersed refuge property following ongoing physical, emotional and financial abuse from his female partner. Barry struggled with support due to his embarrassment and guilt of being a man abused by a woman. He gradually began to gain confidence in his worker and started to open up as he realised he was not being judged.

Barry struggled to keep his ex-partner out of his life and on occasions called the police to the property due to her assaulting him again. He frequently struggled to pay his personal rent as his ex-partner knew exactly when he received his benefits and would then threaten him until he handed over his money. With careful sensitive support, he became more confident in reporting her actions to the police and pressing charges against her. He also managed to regain contact with his child and begin to rebuild relationships with his family.

During his stay in our refuge, staff supported Barry to attend appointments and to bid for suitable properties. Barry was allocated property and following his move from refuge, staff worked alongside other agencies to offer more support. The LDVS support worker was the only person that Barry felt confident speaking about the domestic abuse with. Barry was again subject to abuse from his ex-partner and again pressed charges.

Barry's ex-partner was convicted of domestic abuse against him, and he was proud that he had gained the strength to see it through.

6. Value for Money

The service is considered value for money for the following reasons:

- the original financial modelling ensured that the contract was procured at the minimum cost possible to meet its specific requirements
- the service has been consistently operating at full capacity and demand has grown over the contract period. The service has been successful in bidding for additional funding from other sources (e.g from the Ministry of Justice) to help support this increased demand, but the additional funding is dependent on the core service being in place
- the three delivering partners are already contributing resources to allow the service to run at the current levels

- having reviewed the contract terms and specification, any budget reduction would directly impact on frontline delivery and lead to fewer victims-survivors being supported
- this service reduces demand on the wider health and care and criminal justice systems in Leeds
- the service meets the key council priorities of reducing health inequalities and responding to Covid-19
- opportunities will continue to be sought to secure additional, external, funding in order to increase impact.

7. Conclusions

This review has determined that:

- There remains a clear and demonstrable need for refuge and community support for victims-survivors of domestic abuse
- LDVS is a high quality and well performing service. It is well-led and has a committed staff team who care deeply about helping people escape and recover from their experience of domestic abuse.
- The service regularly receives positive feedback and thanks from people who they have supported.
- The service continues to fulfil the city's ambitions around keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable
- The service has proved to be flexible and responsive to both local and national changes
- The service provides good value for money.

Therefore, the recommendation is to extend the contract with the full 36 months extension. This will provide a good level of stability for the service, clients and staff.