



REPORT TITLE: Extension of the contract for Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service

Cabinet Date	21 st September 2022
Cabinet Member	Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Commissioning
Key Decision	Yes
Purpose of Report	To seek Cabinet approval to extend the term of a call off contract relating to the provision of the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) for a further period of two years on the expiry of the initial five-year contract term.
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet approves the exercise of a two-year extension option (commencing 1st July 2023) under the council's call off contract with GreenSquareAccord Ltd for the provision of the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS).</p> <p>Such call-off contract was awarded under Lot 1 of the Council's existing Gloucestershire Framework Agreement for Domestic Abuse (pursuant to a decision by Cabinet dated 27th September 2017). The extension will be effected in accordance with the extension option provisions of the contract.</p>
Reasons for Recommendations	The extension will secure continuity of support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse in the county; and support delivery of the County Council's statutory duties for domestic abuse under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Resource Implications	<p>The estimated value of the two-year extension will be c. £2.2 million. This figure has been derived from the annual contract value in year 5 of the contract term (£1.1 million) and as outlined in the main report, is inclusive of additional grant funding for Domestic Abuse from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (pursuant to an authorisation from Cabinet, July 2021).</p> <p>The extension will bring the total contract value across the 7-year contract term (inclusive of the 2-year extension) to c.£7 million. The contract is funded from the Council’s Supporting People budget with contributions of: £280K per annum from Children and Families Commissioning and a contribution from the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (up to £54K per annum over the two-year extension period) (alongside the DLUHC grant funding).</p> <p>The contract allows for annual negotiation of the contract value and the estimated value over the two-year extension may be subject to inflationary increase. Any such increases will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and where possible will be absorbed within current funding and/or by remodelling the service.</p>
Background Documents	<p>Cabinet Decision (27th September 2017) Tendering Specialist Domestic Abuse Services.</p> <p>Executive Officer Decision (27th March 2018) To appoint providers to the Gloucestershire Framework Agreement for Domestic Abuse and award a call off contract for Lot 1 services</p> <p>Cabinet Decision (21st July 2021) MHCLG Domestic Abuse Section 31 Grant Funding for 21/22</p> <p>Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy (2021)</p> <p>Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (2021)</p>
Statutory Authority	
Divisional Councillor(s)	
Officer	Name: Claire Procter Tel. no: 01452 328603 Email: Claire.procter@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Timeline	Decision to be taken at September Cabinet to enable notice to be given to the provider of the decision to extend by the 31 st December 2022 in line with the contract requirements.

Background

1. For many years, the Council has worked with its partners to tackle domestic abuse (DA) and improve the support available for victims. In the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Council acquired a new statutory duty to support victims of DA residing in safe accommodation, along with grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support implementation. Last year, in line with the requirements of the Act, the Council published a Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and new 3-year Domestic Abuse strategy. The strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will work collectively to deliver the shared vision of a county where domestic abuse is not tolerated; where everybody can live free from abuse and harm, and where victims and their children have access to the right support at the right time.

Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS)

2. In 2017, Cabinet approved the award of a 5 year call off contract (with a two-year extension option) for the provision of specialist support for victims of domestic abuse in the county (the 'Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service'). The contract was awarded to the provider GreenSquare Group Ltd under Lot 1 of the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Framework Agreement. Following a subsequent merger with Accord Housing Association Limited on 1st April 2021, GreenSquare Group Ltd became GreenSquareAccord Ltd.

3. The initial five-year term of the contract will end on the 30th June 2023. This decision seeks Cabinet approval to exercise the 2-year extension option (provided for under the terms of the contract) for the period 1st July 2023 – 30th June 2025.

4. The Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) is a countywide service providing specialist support to all victims of domestic abuse (female and male) aged 16 plus. Support is tailored to victims based on their level of need/risk with the aim of supporting their safety and the safety of their family. The service provides a helpdesk offering immediate support and advice alongside a range of support packages including:

- 12 week 'floating support' with a trained worker to assist with safety planning, practical matters like housing and finance, and emotional support;
- group work programmes;
- a professionals' helpline for practitioners, including social workers; and
- the provision of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) to support individuals who have been assessed as being at high risk of harm from domestic abuse.

The service also has a role in community awareness raising, engagement and training.

5. GDASS works closely with other statutory agencies in the county, including the police, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), criminal justice, health, social care, safeguarding and the district councils. The service inputs directly into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) process which works to prioritise the safety of DA victims assessed at high or very high risk of harm. The service also provides dedicated workers within the Gloucester multi-agency team within Children's Social Care.

6. In addition to the core GDASS service commissioned by the Council, the Integrated Care Board (formerly Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group) and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) also commission additional specialist provision which is embedded within GDASS. This provision includes: 'Health Independent Domestic Violence Advisors' (IDVAs) based within Gloucestershire Royal Hospital (GRH) and Cheltenham General Hospital (CGH) to provide early intervention support to victims of DA when they attend hospital; GP Development workers to work with general practice on early identification and training; 'Response IDVAs' who are based within the police, and 'Mental Health IDVAs' based within the mental health trust. This specialist provision is co-dependent with the GDASS service and a decision not to exercise the two-year extension could result in its removal.

Performance and outcomes

7. GDASS continues to perform well, and demand remains high. There was a year-on-year increase (an average of 7% per year) in total new external referrals to GDASS over the three-year period 2018/19- 2020/21; reaching 7080 referrals in 2020/21. External referrals reached 7,183 in 2021/22. In 2021/22, 68% of referrals to the helpdesk were from the police, 20% were self-referrals and 12% were from other professionals. Bearing in mind the complexity and vulnerability of the client group, engagement rates with the service are good. On exiting GDASS, service users are asked whether they consent to being contacted in 3-, 6- or 12-months' time for feedback on the support they received. On follow-up, 99% agreed that the support they received was helpful, 95% said GDASS helped them feel safer; and 92% said it increased their self-esteem. 79% reported that they currently felt safe in their own home.

Delivery of the Council's statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

8. The commissioning of GDASS supports delivery of the Council's new statutory duties for DA under the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act; and the strategic priorities identified in the local Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy (2021-24). The work of GDASS directly contributes to four of the five overarching priorities in the strategy; specifically: prevention & early intervention; multi-agency working and pathway development; workforce development; and the provision of high-quality support services for victims.

9. In July 2021, Cabinet approved the allocation of additional funds to GDASS from the DLUHC Domestic Abuse Act grant to fund the provision of support to victims of DA and their families residing in DA safe accommodation. In a variation to the existing contract, GreenSquareAccord Ltd have been commissioned to provide floating support/mobile advocacy to victims residing in the 12 current Places of Safety in the county or in receipt of target hardening safety measures; and to administer a 'flexible funding scheme' offering personalised funding to victims of domestic abuse for housing related needs. The July Cabinet decision also allows for a modification to the GDASS contract for the inclusion of additional grant funding from DLUHC for the provision of floating support within the proposed new Places of Safety and Dispersed Refuge safe accommodation. This accommodation is not yet in place, but the estimated value of the two-year extension makes allowance for this support coming into effect during the extension period.

10. Pursuant to the July 2021 Cabinet decision, the Council issued a contract modification notice by means of a voluntary transparency notice (VEAT) in August 2021. This notice revised the contract value of the Lot 1 GDASS contract up to a maximum spend of £7.56 million to take account of the inclusion of additional DLUHC funding in the contract.

Options

11. The following options have been considered:

- a. Give notice to end the contract at the end of Year 5 and not re-commission a specialist domestic abuse service.

This option was rejected on the basis that it would remove the primary source of specialist support for vulnerable victims of domestic abuse in the county. Removal would have attendant implications for wider system partners, including the police, health and social care, and present significant safeguarding risks.

The additional specialist provision to support victims of DA commissioned by the ICB and OPCC (detailed in paragraph 6) which is embedded in the GDASS contract would also be at risk of removal.

Decommissioning specialist DA support would also be contrary to stated commitments in the local DA strategy and pose a risk to the County Council's implementation of its statutory duty to support victims of domestic abuse residing in DA safe accommodation.

- b. Re-commissioning the service from the end of Year 5

This option was assessed and rejected on the basis that:

- The current provider continues to perform well. Engagement with the service remains good and data indicates that the service is achieving positive outcomes for victims.
- GDASS is integrated within established safeguarding and criminal justice pathways, and a decision to reprocure has the potential to destabilise partnership work on the DA agenda and victim outcomes in the short to medium term. This is contraindicated at a time when the system is working to recover from the impact of the pandemic and may pose a risk to the Council's ability to meet its statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act.
- The provider market is unclear. Further work is needed to understand the strength of the provider market and the impact of financial pressures and pandemic recovery on potential bidders.

c) Exercise the two-year extension option and continue the current contract beyond Year 5 (through to end June 2025).

This is the recommended option for the following reasons:

- It secures continuity of support for victims of domestic abuse from a service which continues to perform well against agreed outcomes
- It provides stability to wider system partners working on the shared DA agenda; and preserves referral pathways into safeguarding, social care, health, criminal justice and housing.
- It supports the Council in delivery of its statutory duty to provide support to victims of DA.
- It allows time for Officers to work with the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to review the current service model and develop longer term commissioning plans for approval by Cabinet.

There is no further extension option beyond July 2025 permitted in the contract. It is therefore appropriate to use the extension period to consider the longer-term commissioning options for the service to ensure that GCC continues to secure best value for money and outcomes for service users. Officers will work with partners via the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to review the current service model and develop recommendations in good time to enable a decision on future commissioning plans to be taken ahead of the expiry of the contract.

Risks

12. The following risks have been assessed:

Risk of challenge from alternative providers- LOW risk

The contract includes an extension option; and as such alternative providers are unlikely to have sufficient grounds for challenge.

The inclusion of DLUHC funding in the GDASS contract will not give rise to an increase in contract value that will exceed the modified contract value (ie, £7.56m) that was published in Find a Tender by means of a voluntary transparency (VEAT) notice in August 2021.

Although there is a risk in respect of any contract modification that it may be subject to legal challenge under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (“PCRs”), the inclusion of DLUHC funding in the GDASS contract proposed in this report is justified under Regulation 72(5) PCRs on the basis that it will not alter the overall nature of the existing contract, nor will it give rise to an increase in contract value which exceeds the above-mentioned modified contract value.

Risk of the current provider does not wish to continue delivery beyond the end of year 5- LOW risk

The extension option has been discussed with the provider and they have indicated that they would like to continue delivery if the recommendation to extend is approved by Cabinet. The contract requires the Council to give notice to the provider of our intentions by the end of December 2022.

Risk of insufficient Council funding to fund the contract over the remaining contract term – MANAGED risk

The necessary funding from Adults for the core service has been allocated in the Supporting People budget. Children and Families Commissioning and the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner have confirmed their contributions for the extension period.

The contract also includes funding from the DLUHC Domestic Abuse Act grant. The DLUHC funding is not ring-fenced and there is no guarantee that the amount of funding GCC receives will remain the same year on year. To mitigate this, the contract variation with GreenSquareAccord Ltd. for delivery of the grant funded elements includes annual break clauses.

The contract allows for annual negotiation of the contract value. This enables the Council to adjust the value, if necessary, in response to cost pressures. Any request from the provider to increase the contract value, for example in response to inflationary pressures, will be considered on a case-by-case basis and where possible will be absorbed within current funding and/or by remodelling the service.

Financial implications

13. Total estimated spend across the 7-year contract (inclusive of the 2-year extension) will be circa £7 million.

14. The estimated value of the two-year extension will be up to £2.2 million. The contract is funded from the Council's Supporting People budget with contributions of: £280K per annum from Children and Families Commissioning; and a contribution from the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (up to £54K per annum over the two-year extension period). As noted above, the contract also now includes grant funding of up to £101,500 per annum from the DLUHC DA grant allocation (pursuant to an authorisation from Cabinet dated 21st July 2021). The Cabinet Decision permitted a further modification to the GDASS contract to allow for the inclusion of additional grant funding from DLUHC up to a value of £60,000 over three years (or £40,000 over the two-year extension) with annual break clauses for Floating Support linked to call off contracts for additional Places of Safety and Dispersed Refuge. This accommodation is not yet in place, but the estimated value of the two-year extension makes allowance for this coming into effect during the extension period. The anticipated inclusion of this funding was included in the revised contract value stated in the VEAT notice.

15. As stated above, the contract allows for annual negotiation of the contract value. Any proposed inflationary increases will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and where possible will be absorbed within current funding and/or by remodelling the service.

16. The GDASS contract sits within Lot 1 of the Gloucestershire Framework Agreement for Domestic Abuse. Total spend under the framework agreement, inclusive of the proposed 2 year extension to the GDASS contract, remains within the estimated overall total funding envelope of the framework agreement of £14 million (approved by Cabinet in September 2017).

Climate change implications

17. Advice has been taken from the Council's Climate Change and Air Quality Officer. The contract extension presents limited opportunity to change the current environmental impact of the service as there will be no change of provider or service specification. The environmental impact of the service is mitigated by delivering support virtually (however, face to face support on a 1:1 or group basis will still be offered where indicated).

18. The provider, GreenSquareAccord Ltd hold ISO 14001 (which is the international standard for environmental management systems) and have EMAS (EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) accreditation. In their new organisational strategy, GreenSquareAccord Ltd set out their intention to develop more environmental and decarbonisation plans as well as working with customers and communities to create carbon-neutral, sustainable services. Commissioners will continue to keep the climate change implications and opportunities for further mitigation under review.

Equality implications

Has an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) been completed? Yes

19. Cabinet Members should read and consider the Equalities Impact Assessment in order to satisfy themselves as decision makers that due regard has been given.

20. GDASS is open to all victims of domestic abuse aged 16 plus (and also provides indirect support to under 18s through support to their parent/carer) including those from protected characteristic groups. The provider works to ensure an inclusive and accessible service; and the EIA did not identify any disproportionate or adverse impact to individuals from a protected characteristic group arising from the contract extension. Commissioners will use contract monitoring to continue to evaluate protected characteristic referrals into GDASS and consider any barriers or challenges as they arise.

21. The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (LPB) is considering how to increase reporting of abuse amongst specific groups currently underrepresented in data across all commissioned domestic abuse services, to understand the true prevalence of domestic abuse and participation from these groups. The LPB is also considering how to respond to the findings of the Domestic Abuse needs assessment with respect to support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse (noting that this is outside of the remit of the GDASS contract).

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) implications

22. The DPIA decision checklist has identified that a DPIA will be required for the extension period. This is being completed with input from IMS to ensure that due consideration is given to data protection impacts arising from the extension of the current contract. The contract was awarded prior to the introduction of the current data protection regulations. As such the controller/processor relationship between GCC and the provider GreenSquareAccord requires further clarification and work is already underway to ensure adequate provisions are in the contract. A data processing schedule that accurately reflects our contracted relationship with GreenSquareAccord will be produced and appended to the contract, and relevant privacy information will be provided to all parties

Social value implications

23. The provision of support to victims of domestic abuse has social, environmental, and economic benefits for the Gloucestershire population. Analysis by the Home Office (January 2019) indicates the high social and economic costs arising from domestic abuse including but not limited to the physical and emotional harm to the individual, lost productivity, and the cost to health services, the police and housing providers. The provision of services, such as GDASS improves the life outcomes of victims and their children with attendant social gains for individuals and local communities.

24. GDASS offers additional social value through initiatives such as local recruitment of staff as well as offering apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities. The current provider GreenSquareAccord builds and lets affordable housing in the county.

25. Any future commissioning and procurement exercise for the provision of domestic abuse support services will include social value as one of the considerations in the evaluation of future providers. GCC is committed to a performance and evidence-based approach to Social Value. Based on the National TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) developed by the Social Value Portal, providers are required to propose credible targets against which performance will be monitored.

Consultation feedback

26. A full consultation has not taken place with respect to this decision on the basis that no material changes to the delivery model or service specification are proposed.

27. Engagement with service users and partner organisations took place in 2021 to inform the DA Needs Assessment and the development of the Gloucestershire DA strategy. Feedback indicated the value of specialist domestic abuse support to victims; and this is reflected in the county's strategic priorities. Going forward, a Consultation Officer has been recruited (funded from the DLUHC grant and based within the OPCC) to lead the development of a Consultation Group which will form part of the Local Partnership Board. The group will help ensure that the voice of victims and people with lived experience of domestic abuse informs the work of the LPB and future commissioning intentions.

Officer recommendations

28. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the extension of the contract with GreenSquareAccord Ltd for a further two years for the reasons outlined in this report.

29. Discussion has taken place with support services, including but not limited to legal, procurement, and finance. Their advice has informed the stated recommendations and risk assessment.

Performance management/follow-up

30. Performance management is built into the contract, with a requirement for the provider to submit quarterly performance data and attend quarterly and mid quarter contract monitoring meetings. A comprehensive set of performance data is reported on, including output and outcome data; narrative information on service provision, case studies, group work reports, protected characteristic data and financial data. A whole service review is completed annually

which includes the completion of a standard template, submission of up-to-date policies and procedures and a visit to the service premises.