

Women's Aid Leicestershire Ltd are grateful for the opportunity to have representation at the Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting in March 2015.

1. Women's Aid Leicestershire Ltd are a registered Charity and have been supporting victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence since 1974 when we opened the first Refuge in Leicester.
2. We have a number of concerns around the current Changing Specialist Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland consultation that you are running and we have formally responded to the questions presented.
3. We are not aware of an Equality Impact Assessment OR Social Return on Investment having been undertaken and we are keen to understand what service users from marginalised or socially excluded groups say about the proposed options for services and how co procurement across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland will meet their needs.
4. As a small Charity and active member of the voluntary sector, we are concerned that a large contract value of over £800K will make it impossible for small specialist Providers to compete. Your rules mean that no more than a third of income can come from the tender value. So we can't compete, or even bid without bidding in partnership with a much larger organisation than us. This will lead to a loss of specialism and diversity in the sector. Smaller charities have the capacity to make an important financial contribution to the City because we are able to attract funds from Trust and grant making bodies which larger commercial organisations are unable to do.
5. Let me make the point that we bid because we have to in order to follow your rules but our motivation is not profit or market based – but to safeguard and save the lives of women and children. And our value base is to provide a refuge as a place of safety where women can mutually support each other NOT the next available housing association flat wherever it might be located.

We don't have a commercial imperative that your market based approach inevitably fosters, and as a Labour run Council we find this staggering given the widespread criticisms of applying a market economy to social services.

6. In addition, we understand that a payment by results model will be implemented in the Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence service and we question the rationale as to why these contracts are deemed suitable for Payment by Results when other City Council contracts are not. This is an extremely difficult model for us to work with, given that due to the nature of the work, results are neither regular nor predictable. However we know we deliver value for money.
7. Such payment arrangements may present a major barrier for smaller organisations that may not have the necessary cash flow or reserves. Therefore we wish to ask

what help you will give to tenderers to ensure a level playing field, particularly for smaller specialist providers.

8. In addition, we are concerned that such contracts do not incentivise sustainable outcomes, may lead to women and children repeating cycles of Domestic violence unnecessarily and NOT lead to service improvement and quality.
9. We fully understand the challenges in the current economic climate but we question your approach which seems to be Anti the voluntary specialist sector. We are the only CAADA and National Women's Aid Accredited Charity in the City and yet you seem to take no notice of this or the hard work we do.
10. We provide a Refuge in the City that you don't fund and you don't seem interested in collecting the statistics of women and children we support in it, although you and your funded agencies are happy to refer women and children in need to it.
11. In the austerity climate we have cut our salaries to all our staff; our managers to staff ratio and honed our ways of working and there are no further cuts to make. Yet we don't see you - the City council speaking on our behalf to National Government about our predicament.

To be quite honest we feel abandoned by the City Council as a specialist accredited provider.

12. In fact - as International Women's Day has just gone by with heightened awareness of the impact of austerity on all Women- .particularly those facing Domestic or Sexual Violence -

Women's Aid Leicestershire are very concerned that should the City Council continue to operate in this manner with little consultation with the voluntary sector or understanding of the impact of their decision making, or commissioning approach specialist Providers like us will cease to exist. This will be a loss to the City and a devastating loss to victims of domestic and sexual violence who rely on our services.

And then who will support the 1000 women and 1300 children in Leicester and Leicestershire that we support though horrendous trauma every year?