

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 2 November 2021 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Gary Collins (Chair), Alex Anderson (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Bukky Okunade, Shane Ralph and Elizabeth Rigby (*arrived 7.04pm*)
- In attendance:** Michelle Cunningham, Community Safety Partnership Manager
Luke Froment, Children Looked After Service Manager
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead – Looked After Children and Aftercare
Fran Leddra, Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care
Jason Read, Youth Offending Operations Manager
Cheryl Wells, Strategic Lead – Community Safety, Emergency Planning, and Resilience
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

3. Essex Police: Verbal Update

The Committee were informed that due to the rescheduling of the meeting, Essex Police were unable to attend and present their verbal update. The Chair stated that they would be invited to the next meeting to present an update.

4. Thurrock Council's Response to Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care introduced the report and stated that it provided a high-level strategic view of the Council's position on modern day slavery (MDS) and human trafficking. She stated that under the 2015 Modern Day Slavery Act both MDS and human trafficking had been consolidated to ensure increased support and protection for victims. She explained that MDS was the illegal exploitation of people for reasons of sex, forced labour, and in some extreme cases organ harvesting. She added that MDS could happen to people of any

age, gender or race, and included human trafficking, which was the coercive movement of people using threats and violence. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care explained that Thurrock had an MDS strategy and action plan in place, and helped train people on how to spot MDS and how to respond. She added that Thurrock were also part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which helped identify victims of MDS and human trafficking, and offer them the appropriate support. She highlighted that in 2020/21 no adults had been referred through the NRM to Thurrock. The Youth Offending Operations Manager stated that four children had been referred through the NRM scheme, but these were due to criminal exploitation rather than MDS or human trafficking. She stated that Thurrock was best placed to understand how MDS and human trafficking could affect people, for example Thurrock had coped with the incident in October 2019 when 39 people had been found dead in a lorry in Purfleet, and had helped bring about criminal convictions for human trafficking for the perpetrators. She added that following the tragic death of those 39 people, Thurrock had become part of Operation Melrose and Operation Bluebird, which were multiagency operations including the Council, police and Port Watch. She highlighted point 2.5 of the report which outlined the improvements that had been borne from these operations.

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care then moved on and highlighted point 2.8 of the report, which outlined Thurrock's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. She outlined appendix 4 of the report which showed Thurrock's Council's new MDS Statement, and whilst not compulsory, was in line with government best practice. She stated that point 3.1 of the report highlighted the Local Government Association (LGA) guidance for Councillors dealing with MDS, including how to improve understanding and supporting victims. She stated that this was broken down into sections such as: identification; support; and disruption. She summarised and stated that the next steps for the team were carrying out an audit into Council staff understanding of MDS and trialling a newsletter for partners highlighting MDS.

Councillor Anderson highlighted point 2.5 on page 133 of the agenda, where the report highlighted that increased partnership working had been achieved through partner meetings. He queried how these meetings had increased communication. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that the meetings had been productive as different agencies had been able to meet and share intelligence. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the meetings brought together different agencies that, before Operation Melrose, did not usually meet, for example immigration, ports, and local police teams. She explained that these meetings helped identify local patterns in MDS and human trafficking, and targeted actions were put into place using joint operations and police officers who were dedicated to areas of potential MDS, such as the ports, certain local roads, and Moto services at Lakeside. She stated that these operations had led to both criminal charges and civil penalties, and had improved the risk management response to MDS and human trafficking, as well as improving the work of local immigration teams. Councillor Anderson

felt it was good to hear that multiagency working was occurring. He added that the Nationality and Borders Bill was currently progressing through parliament, and asked if Thurrock had been invited to take part in the consultation process for this. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that the consultation for this Bill had been surrounding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and similar prevalent issues in England. She stated that Thurrock had provided feedback as part of this consultation, which had highlighted the criminality aspects of trafficked young people, and the problems of some UASC presenting as younger than their real age.

Councillor Ralph thanked officers for their report and queried which MDS and human trafficking issues were specific to Thurrock, for example human trafficking for car washes. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care explained that this report provided a high-level strategic overview as this was the first Committee meeting, but a report detailing specific Thurrock problems regarding MDS could be provided at a later meeting. She explained that the team were aware and involved with cases of human trafficking in places such as car washes, nail bars and takeaways. She added that the team were monitoring certain locations, had sent out notices, and were undertaking inspections when needed. Councillor Ralph then highlighted appendix 3 which covered VAWG, but did not specify MDS and human trafficking problems for men and boys, such as human trafficking for work in car washes and takeaways. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied and explained that when the Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking strategy had been developed, it had been a standalone strategy, and it had been difficult to keep engagement and momentum with the action plan. She added that as Thurrock were a small authority, with a small team, there had not been the officer capacity to continue with this as a standalone strategy, so it had had to be moved under the VAWG umbrella. She understood that VAWG was only a small part of human trafficking, but appendix 3 covered all types of MDS, including violence against men and boys. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care added that the action plan did include all genders, ages, and races, but she would take back the comment to the team. Councillor Ralph asked if the title could be changed to include violence against men and boys. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that VAWG was in line with and formed part of a national strategy. She explained that violence against men and boys was included in the strategy, which had been updated in October 2021 by the Home Office.

Councillor Abbas highlighted point 2.5 of the report and asked if the increased partnership working between organisations had had an impact on MDS, such as an increased number of prosecutions, or a reduction in the number of victims of MDS. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care stated that this information would only be known by the police, but would need to remain confidential due to ongoing investigations. She stated that awareness of MDS and human trafficking had increased because of the partnership working, which had subsequently led to more training for appropriate partner colleagues.

The Chair queried how many people had been freed from MDS in the past 12 months. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that no adults had been referred through the NRM in 2020/21. The Chair then questioned how awareness had been raised, and if the Day of Anti-Slavery on 18 October 2021 had been publicised. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Day of Anti-Slavery had been publicised through social media this year, but last year a billboard and high street stall had been erected to highlight the signs of MDS and human trafficking, and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. She added that Thurrock had begun a local campaign in 2019 with Crimestoppers, but following the death of 39 people in Purfleet, this became a national campaign including the Home Office, which had focussed on lorry drivers and MDS, rather than community awareness. She explained that post-COVID the team were working on social media campaigns to highlight MDS and human trafficking to the local community.

Councillor Abbas then questioned what was meant by officers working towards a 'hostile environment' for the perpetrators of MDS and human trafficking in Thurrock. The Community Safety Partnership Manager responded that it meant Thurrock officers and other agencies were stopping people at the point of entry, thus ensuring that traffickers did not want to operate in Thurrock. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care added that the Adult Safeguarding team were experienced in dealing with MDS and human trafficking, and could thoroughly investigate MDS concerns. She explained that in 2020/21 no referrals had been made through the NRM, but safeguarding cases were steadily increasing this year due to the reduction of COVID restrictions. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare added that the team would work to ensure victims of MDS and human trafficking were supported and not treated as criminals, for example they would not be arrested; would be provided with a social worker; and given homes where appropriate. She explained that Operation Melrose had increased the profile of MDS and human trafficking, and therefore made it more difficult for traffickers to operate in Thurrock and the wider Essex area.

Councillor Rigby questioned if more human trafficking cases were being seen due to the reduction of travel restrictions. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that during COVID the team had seen evidence of human trafficking and MDS going underground, as less people were coming through the border and more checks were being made. She stated that the team had seen increased examples of exploitation online, or the problem materialising in different ways, which had been discussed during a recent MDS summit held by the Prime Minister.

The Chair moved the debate onto appendix 4 of the report on page 191 of the agenda, and asked if Members had any comment on the draft MDS Statement. Councillor Ralph felt that it covered all of the necessary teams, for example social services, trading standards, and licensing. Councillor Okunade

questioned who would be the reader of the statement. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that it would be the mission statement of the Council, and provided partners and the public with the Council's statement of intent regarding MDS and human trafficking. Councillor Abbas queried if it was Thurrock Council's responsibility to ensure businesses complied with the Statement, and if awareness would be raised with businesses and contractors. He also asked if the Statement would be reviewed annually. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Council needed to adopt the Statement first before going out to businesses. She added that it would be reviewed annually.

Councillor Rigby asked if violence against men and boys could be included in point 3 of the Statement, where violence against women and girls was discussed, to ensure men and boys were not excluded. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the VAWG name could not be changed as it was a national strategy, but that men and boys would not be excluded. Councillor Rigby highlighted the Work Programme for December, and queried if the report on Violence against Men and Boys would be a discussion, rather than a strategy. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that Violence against Men and Boys was not a strategy, but could be a topic for discussion. Councillor Abbas asked if a paragraph, or wording, could be added to the statement to ensure men and boys were included. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that she would take this away for consideration. Councillor Anderson highlighted appendix 4 and felt it was good to see procurement processes being included as part of MDS, to ensure that slave labour would not be used to produce items used by Thurrock Council.

The Chair summarised and stated that the MDS Statement needed to look outward into the community, rather than looking inward at the work being undertaken by Thurrock Council. He felt that the current draft of the MDS Statement was passive, and wanted to see it become more active, for example by suggesting the boycott of businesses that used MDS and forced labour. He highlighted section three of the Statement and felt that violence against men and boys should be included alongside violence against women and girls. The Committee agreed that they could not support recommendation two until the necessary changes had been made to the Council's MDS Statement. The Committee also agreed upon a quarterly report on MDS to ensure the Council were monitoring and fulfilling its MDS plans.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to Modern Day Slavery (MDS) and human trafficking in Thurrock Council.

2. Agreed a quarterly report through the annual work plan for the monitoring of identified actions, to ensure that the Council fulfils its plans in relation to the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015.

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult

Social Care left the meeting at 7.57pm

5. Thurrock Council's Response to Criminal Gang Activity

The Youth Offending Operations Manager introduced the report and stated that it provided an overview of Thurrock's response to criminal gang activity in the borough. He stated that in this context gang meant people that saw themselves as a defined group; laid claim over specific territory, either geographically or relating to specific drugs; and were in conflict with another gang. He stated that recently, county lines operations had been receiving increased national press, and explained that this was a business model used by gangs to deal drugs, that exploited children and trafficked them to sell drugs in a certain area. He stated that most of the children that had been referred through the NRM process, had been referred due to their participation in county lines drug activity or were being exploited locally. He explained that criminal gang activity also included knife crime and serious youth violence. He explained that in 2019, the Home Office had identified and provided funding for the 18 worst affected knife crime areas, which included Essex. He added that this funding had been used to set up the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit (EVVU), whose three aims had been to: reduce hospital admissions for knife wounds for those aged under 25; reduce knife violence for those aged under 25; and reduce homicides from knives for those aged under 25. The Youth Offending Operations Manager explained that the EVVU had begun this work by trying to identify criminal gangs, and had worked in partnership with local communities and local authorities. He explained that this process had identified young people at risk from exploitation by gangs, and had helped them to leave.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager moved on and stated that Thurrock Council had written a report in 2020 on serious youth violence, which was based on a public health approach to gangs that had been used successfully to reduce knife crime in cities such as Glasgow. He stated that it used a similar long-term model as used for tackling COVID, based on surveillance; primary prevention; secondary prevention; and tertiary prevention. He moved on and explained that the EVVU had set up the Violence and Vulnerability Board (VVB), which was chaired by the Essex Fire and Crime Commissioner and had received funding for Thurrock to be able to spend locally. He stated that the VVB were focussed on safeguarding children, as well as vulnerable adults, for example by protecting them from cuckooing, which was a process whereby a drug dealer would set up shop in the house of a vulnerable adult and traffic children to that house for drug activity. He stated that the majority of children used in county lines and cuckooing were involved in the distribution of class-A drugs such as crack and heroin, and the VVB had worked with Essex Police to identify local hotspots and undertake a criminal justice approach. He commented that the team had also used in-depth data to triangulate those children most at risk from exploitation by gangs, such as children in need and children with special needs. He explained that the team used a programme called Xantura to gather this data alongside other agencies and partners.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were currently trying to raise awareness of criminal gang activity in schools, for example the Youth Offending Service had a dedicated team member that collaborated with schools. He explained that they undertook curriculum based work in primary and secondary schools, as well as local colleges; provided leaflets for parents; and leaflets for professionals in schools. He stated that the Brighter Futures team also provided teaching for parents whose children were at risk from gang exploitation. He stated that these programmes had increased the reach of the Youth Offending Service and provided detached youth workers, who were funded through the VVB, and worked in criminal gang hotspots to prevent the exploitation of children. He explained that the Youth Offending team had also delivered online roadshows for the past two years for Years 4, 5, and 6, which had been offered to all schools in Thurrock. He added that the roadshows had been based on a presentation to help students understand criminal gang activity and exploitation. He explained that the VVB had also provided funding for St Stevens, which were a charity that undertook outreach work in West Thurrock and South Stifford, as well as working with the detached youth workers.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager moved on and explained how the team had developed a Schools Policy on Knife Crime that was implemented when a young person in school was found with a knife in their possession and worked to try and avoid exclusion. He explained that a risk assessment was undertaken and the police would intervene where necessary with the child, their family and the school. He stated that the Pupil Referral Units (PRU) could be hotspots for exploitation, and the Schools Policy on Knife Crime aimed to keep children in mainstream schooling where appropriate. He added that the Youth Offending Service worked closely with the Olive Academy to prevent students being exploited by criminal gangs.

Councillor Ralph thanked officers for their work on the report, and asked how confident the team were that they would continue to receive funding from the VVB. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that funding would be received until March 2022, and the team were currently working with Essex on ensuring future funding was agreed, to embed the work that had been undertaken locally. He explained that although funding in future would not be as high as was currently being received, the VVB were working with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to ensure the highest levels of funding would be granted. He added that the EVVU would also be able to choose how to spend funding locally, for example they would use surveillance to determine areas most in need, and would partner with the police to ensure funding would be spent in the right places. The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were also providing training to various teams in the Council, such as the Cleaner and Greener team, as well as running local community training sessions, to increase awareness of criminal gang activity. Councillor Ralph then asked how the team worked to identify children that were at risk of being exploited by gangs, particularly those children that displayed no other identifiable criteria, such as being a child in need. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the team provided 'Know the Signs' training

for schools and parents, which included if their child was going missing more often, their school attendance was decreasing, they had access to more money, and were buying more expensive items such as clothes and games consoles. He stated that Thurrock had its own specialist Missing Panel, which worked with the police to find children who had gone missing.

Councillor Abbas thanked the team for their work on the report, and felt impressed by appendix 2 of the report. He asked how the team were currently delivering leaflets. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that leaflets were being delivered to vulnerable groups, such as children identified by the Youth Offending Service, children being monitored through safeguarding processes, and children in need. He explained that leaflets were also used to target parents whose child was at risk of gang exploitation, and online training for parents could also be provided. Councillor Abbas highlighted appendix 1 of the report, and asked how the public health approach to tackling serious youth violence would be implemented. The Youth Offending Operations Manager responded that it was a statutory duty for the Director of Public Health to publish a report, and the public health approach to serious youth violence was currently regarded as the best approach. He explained that it was a long-term process, but would meet the need of the local community.

Councillor Anderson stated that in recent years, an injunction had been brought against members of the C17 gang, and asked if this had been an effective tool against gang members. He queried if this process of injunctions would be used against other gangs in future. The Youth Offending Operations Manager explained that funding had been provided to the Community Safety Partnership, who were currently working with the police to gather evidence against a new gang and bring appropriate action, which could include an injunction. He added that the C17 gang injunction had been funded through Thurrock Council, and had gone through a long process in the civil court to be granted. He explained that an injunction could only be passed based on the balance of probability, and therefore lots of evidence needed to be collected before it could go to court. He explained that the C17 gang injunction had received lots of attention from the national press due to its success, and was now being used more widely, for example by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Councillor Okunade felt it was good to hear about the Schools Policy on Knife Crime, and asked if schools were cooperating with the policy. She also asked if children were reoffending after the policy had been used. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the Schools Policy on Knife Crime had been adopted by the Council in April 2020, and to date four children had been kept in mainstream schooling because of the policy. He felt that the schools had become more cooperative, partly because OFSTED had changed their messaging regarding knife crime. He felt that it was early days for the Schools Policy on Knife Crime, but schools were adopting and using the policy. He added that funding was also being provided to the Olive Academy to provide specific re-integration workers so children could return to mainstream schools when appropriate. The Youth Offending Operations

Manager felt that a holistic approach was being taken by all partners on all levels to reduce knife crime and criminal gang activity in Thurrock.

Councillor Rigby asked what direct contact the team were having with children at risk of exploitation by gangs. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the team could either work directly with specific children at risk of exploitation, or could provide a more general approach to whole year groups in primary or secondary schools. He stated that the team approached every school in Thurrock at the beginning of the academic year to offer them training sessions with the children, as well as post-16 education settings such as SEEVIC and Palmers. The Chair questioned how the team were working to combat anti-police messaging disseminated through drill music over social media. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that both national and local governments were finding it hard to tackle issues occurring over social media. He stated that the team encourages children to make music, as it was an important creative outlet, but tried to focus the music on a more positive message.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Assured themselves of the response by Thurrock Council to address criminal gang activity in Thurrock.**
- 2. Contributed to the delivery of this agenda, ensuring that communities have a voice within this agenda.**
- 3. Agreed an annual report on the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Board to address criminal gang activity in Thurrock be brought to the Committee.**

6. Thurrock Council's Response to Prevent Duty 2015

The Community Safety Partnership Manager introduced the report and stated that the Council's Prevent duty was outlined in the 2015 Counterterrorism Act, and Members would be asked to scrutinise Thurrock's response to Prevent and help to improve services. She stated that the national current threat level was classed as substantial, which meant that a terrorist attack was likely. She explained that the threat level had remained the same after the tragic death of Sir David Amess MP, as although it was being treated as a terrorist incident, there was no specific threat to the wider UK. She stated that the LGA self-assessment was included at appendix two of the report, and helped local authorities mitigate threats. She explained that Thurrock also had its own Channel Panel that assisted people who were vulnerable to terrorism, and appendix 3 of the report contained Thurrock's annual self-assessment. She stated that counterterrorism had been a priority of the Community Safety Partnership in 2021, and would likely continue to be a priority in 2022, alongside the local Prevent Strategy which had been developed and consulted on with the Prevent Working Group.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that the Prevent self-assessment worked using a Red, Amber, and Green rating system and had found seven green criteria and three amber criteria. She explained that one of the amber criteria related to the Prevent training programme, which had moved online since the onset of COVID. She explained that although the team had received positive feedback on the training, there was currently no needs assessment in place which would ensure the training was reaching the right people and being undertaken correctly. She added that now the training was online there was no system to be able to monitor who completed it. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the Home Office were currently renewing the training offer, but all Thurrock schools had somebody trained and accredited in Prevent, in line with the Section 157 safeguarding assessment. She explained that the next amber criteria related to venue hire. She commented that a policy regarding Prevent and venue hire had been adopted by Thurrock Council and sent to schools, and a policy regarding venue hire and community buildings was currently being drafted. The Community Safety Partnership Manager stated that the final amber criteria related to community engagement with Prevent, as she felt this area could always be improved upon.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that Thurrock was a non-funded Prevent Council, but the national Prevent scheme had now begun to provide local Prevent advisors, who would develop communications with stakeholders and would help include Prevent in the Local Plan. She summarised and stated that the Channel Panel assessment was also being updated to include new processes and ensure all vulnerable people were appropriately supported.

Councillor Anderson stated that the murderer of Sir David Amess MP had been reported to Prevent and had worked with the Channel Panel. He asked what was being done to ensure people continued to be monitored once they had completed the Channel Panel process. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that he sat on the Channel Panel and explained that people were subject to a six and twelve month review once they had completed the process. He stated that once they had completed the process, they were linked with positive resources in the community to reduce risk as much as possible. He stated that at the twelve month review, the person was provided with a clear exit strategy and continuing support where necessary. Councillor Anderson questioned if people completing Channel Panel were paired with a role model at the end of the process. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that people who completed Channel Panel were linked to positive role models within their community who could provide an ongoing support network, for example people referred to Channel Panel because of Islamic extremism were linked with positive Mosques and Imams; and people referred to Channel Panel because of right wing extremism were linked to relevant positive organisations for support.

Councillor Okunade left the meeting at 8.50pm

Councillor Abbas highlighted the risk assessment at appendix 2 of the report,

and queried how the Council would work with local for hire venues to ensure they met the Prevent duty. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that during COVID venue hire had been immaterial because of government restrictions, so the Council had focussed on Prevent in schools. She stated that currently the venue hire process in relation to Prevent for Council buildings and schools, had been finalised and agreed, but this process still needed finalising for community venues such as village halls. She explained that community venues could not be forced to adopt the Prevent venue hire policy, but could be advised and encouraged. Councillor Abbas then questioned how effective the Prevent system was at countering terrorism. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that an independent review into Prevent was currently underway, and some findings were being pre-empted, which was why local Prevent advisors were being established. She highlighted that Thurrock was not a Prevent funded area, but had completed the Prevent self-assessment. She added that the Prevent system had learnt lots of lessons from incidents such as the Parsons Green bombing, and worked with the Channel Panels to ensure all Prevent recommendations were being fulfilled. She explained that Thurrock were currently undertaking an audit of cases that had gone through Channel Panel, and children identified as at risk of going through Channel Panel to ensure that all steps were being undertaken. The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were ensuring all the necessary checks had been carried out. He explained that the Channel Panel had thousands of successful interventions across the country, but this was negated by the handful of unsuccessful cases that were reported extensively in the media.

Councillor Ralph asked how the team were working to educate young people against extreme beliefs, particularly at college and university level. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Education Safeguarding Forum had been briefed today and resources for schools shared, including education against extremism for those aged under 16 called Educate Against Hate. She stated that resources for schools, such as lesson plans and information for parents, was also available through the Lets Talk About It website. She mentioned that representatives from Palmers College and South Essex College also sat on the Prevent Board and attended seminars on how to have a conversation with young people about terrorism.

The Chair thanked the team for their work and questioned why left-wing extremism was not discussed as part of the Prevent strategy. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the team received quarterly briefings that outlined current Prevent issues that directed and dictated the strategy. She stated that the latest focus was surrounding Incels, which was now included as part of the local strategy. She explained that the briefings did not currently include left-wing extremism and therefore were not included as part of the strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to the self-assessment audit completed using the Local Government Association

Toolkit and provided for scrutiny at Appendix 2.

2. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to the Channel Panel self-assessment completed in April 2021 and provided for scrutiny at Appendix 3.

3. Agreed a process through the annual work plan for monitoring of identified actions to ensure Thurrock Council fulfils its duty in relation to Prevent.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager left the meeting at 9.08pm

7. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Introductory Report

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare introduced the report and stated that Thurrock Council had a responsibility to UASC as part of the Looked After Children and care-leavers service. She explained that each local authority in the UK was allocated to take UASC equal to 0.07% of their total population by the government, which equated to 31 children in Thurrock. She highlighted that the actual number of children accepted into Thurrock could fluctuate above and below this number depending on a variety of factors. She stated that UASC travelled from their home countries, such as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, without a responsible adult and were under the age of 18 applying for asylum. She stated that sometimes children travelled on their own, or with a sibling, and were often trafficked. She stated that the team had to assess whether a UASC had been trafficked or were refugees.

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare commented that there were numerous points of entry for UASC in Thurrock, although the preferred point of entry was in Dover. She stated that this meant Council's in Kent took a disproportionately large number of UASCs, and had led to the government introducing the National Transfer Scheme, that meant UASC could be allocated to a different part of the country to their point of entry, and ensured all Councils were meeting their allocation target. She stated that accepting an UASC was not a statutory duty for a local authority, and required cooperation between different local authorities.

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare explained that when a child entered the UK they were required to provide their age. She stated that this could often be difficult as some children did not know their date of birth, or would lie to make themselves younger than their actual age. She stated that if there was debate surrounding their age, or they looked over 25, then an age assessment would be undertaken by an accredited person following Home Officer guidance. She stated that younger UASC were often trafficked for MDS, and Thurrock worked closely with the police to ensure best practice was being followed and all safeguarding criterion were met. She stated that Thurrock's social work team would work quickly to build trust and rapport with a trafficked child who could be vulnerable to further trafficking issues.

Councillor Anderson questioned the current process regarding age assessments, and if this was due to be updated in the future. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare responded that all UASC would be treated as children unless clearly over 18. She explained that immigration workers would have a conversation with the UASC, for example would ask questions about their schooling or work history to determine their age. She stated that if a UASC was determined to be older than 18 then they would not be accommodated and would work with immigration officials. Councillor Anderson questioned if there would be future reform, for example the use of dental x-rays to determine a person's age. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that there were no proposed changes, but a new Bill was being taken through Parliament that related to older migrants. She explained that a consultation was taking place on the new Bill, but that it was a contentious area. She highlighted that only experienced social workers would undertake age assessments and the interviews were highly technical. She commented that there was currently some pushback regarding using dental x-rays to determine age, as this could be subject to a legal challenge. She stated that every age assessment went through two layers of social work expertise and a risk assessment was carried out on every UASC.

Councillor Ralph questioned how effective the team were at tracking missing UASC. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that missing UASC were tracked through regular UASC meetings, but the responsibility to find a missing person was with the police. She stated that the team would make sure all the necessary agencies, such as the police, the Home Office, and immigration were aware if any UASC went missing.

The Chair stated due to the time limit of the venue, the rest of the discussion on the item would need to be deferred to the next appropriate Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) presenting to Thurrock.**
- 2. Are aware Corporate Parenting Responsibilities extend to (UASC)**

8. Work Programme

The Committee agreed that the following items be added to the Work Programme:

1. The deferred discussion regarding UASC
2. Hate crime and social media
3. Violence against men and boys

The meeting finished at 9.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**