

21 October 2021		ITEM: 6
Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee		
Thurrock Council's Response to Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Fran Leddra : Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Adult Social Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Les Billingham, Adult Social Care and Communities		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake, Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report details Thurrock Council's response to Modern Day Slavery (MDS) and Human Trafficking (HT). The two are closely linked, and involve the movement of people through coercion, control and exploitation for financial gain. People are often trafficked to then become the victims of MDS. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 consolidated slavery and human trafficking offences to ensure that there is enhanced support and protection for victims and that perpetrators can receive suitably severe sentences.

The Act ensures that Police and other law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to pursue, disrupt and bring to justice those engaged in human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced compulsory labour. Thurrock Adult Social Care and Children's Services and Community Safety Partnership have an important role to play in preventing, responding and partnering with our police colleagues to ensure that those suffering exploitation in this way can be protected.

The Act specifies public authorities, including local authorities are required to notify the Home Office about any potential victims of modern slavery they encounter in England and Wales. Adult cases who do not provide consent to be referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process, automatically become Duty to Notify (DtN) referrals on the new online system.

Councils are uniquely placed to be at the forefront of the fight against modern slavery, and whilst we are currently under no legal obligation to publish a statement, this will be included in the new provisions of the Modern Day Slavery Act when it is updated and amended. By voluntarily completing Modern Slavery Transparency Statements, we are demonstrating awareness and ethical leadership and in line with

good practice. Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership has drafted a statement which is detailed in this report for consideration.

Thurrock will have victims of MDS, and organised crime groups involved in immigration crime are highly exploitative of vulnerable adults and children, charging large sums of money for their illegal services.

As seen in the tragic case of Operation Melrose, which resulted in the death of 39 Vietnamese men, women and children in Purfleet, Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) in relation to the trafficking of people through our ports can be highly dangerous and ultimately cost lives.

Through the police led Operation Bluebird, the police have sought to disrupt Organised Immigration Crime through establishing links with Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) enabling us to work upstream to prevent further harm.

This paper allows Elected Members the opportunity to scrutinise the implementation of the Modern Slavery Act by Thurrock Council, and understand Thurrock's response to Human Trafficking. The LGA document "Councillor Guide to Tackling MDS" (Appendix 1) identifies the role councillors can play to help tackle this issue and are broadly summed up as the following 2 aspects¹:

1. Incorporate modern slavery within the Council's work;
2. Scrutinising the work of the council and its partners on modern day slavery, and holding them to account.

1. Recommendations:

1.1 That Members of the Committee scrutinise and assure themselves of the response to MDS and human trafficking in Thurrock Council.

1.2 That Members of the Committee consider Thurrock's statement on MDS and recommend to Cabinet for sign off.

1.3 That Members agree a process through the annual work plan for monitoring of identified actions to ensure that the Council fulfils its plans in relation to Modern Slavery Act 2015.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Modern Slavery Act was introduced in 2015, ((Appendix 2) consolidating previous legislation relating to Human trafficking. The term 'Modern Slavery' captures a whole range of types of exploitation, many of which occur together. **Modern Slavery** includes but is not limited to:

- sexual exploitation
- domestic servitude
- forced labour

¹ In forward by Councillor Simon Blackburn Chair, LGA Safer Stronger Communities Board

- criminal exploitation
- other forms of exploitation: organ removal; forced begging; forced benefit fraud; forced marriage and illegal adoption.

2.2 **Human trafficking** is defined as the acquisition of people through the use of force, coercion or other means with the aim of exploiting them. Men, women and children can be the victims of trafficking either in their own countries or abroad. Trafficking occurs both across the borders and within a country. The trafficking of children can be defined as the movement of children for the purpose of exploitation and it is irrelevant if any form of coercion issued.

2.3 On 23rd October 2019 Essex Police launched the largest investigation in their history after 39 people – men, women and children - were found dead in a lorry trailer in Purfleet, Thurrock. The criminals, now brought to justice, in this case made their money from misery, and treating their victims as a commodity.

Operation Bluebird, previously referred to as Portswatch, is the partnership response led by the District Commander for Thurrock to ensure we have a better understanding of Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) and that all partners respond to events in a proactive and consistent manner to ensure that we stop those taking advantage of people vulnerable to exploitation, and safeguard potential future victims.

2.4 Operation Bluebird has highlighted how agencies work together to tackle this crime type through mobilisation of the power of partnerships, including Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and National Crime Agency.

2.5 There have been significant improvements achieved and positive outcomes from this work:

- Improved partnership working between (but not limited to); Thurrock Council (Community Safety, Adults and Children's Social Care); Port of Tilbury Police; British Transport Police; Essex Fire & Rescue; Border Force; Immigration Enforcement; National Crime Agency; commercial partners, and; non-governmental organisations & faith groups.
- This was achieved through partner meetings for public-sector professionals, business and communities (including non-government Organisation), multi-agency, joint proactive operations and development of shared situational briefings.
- Improved strategy around unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who go missing through joint working with Children's Social Care overcoming difficulties in getting professionals together to develop strategies around finding and safeguarding a missing UASC child. A memorandum of understanding is now in place.
- Improved response to Operation Bluebird events occurring in both Essex and within our ports. All agencies involved now follow an agreed response plan to reach a safe and effective outcome.

- Delivery of awareness training and upskilling across all partners to ensure consistency of response.
- Improved community relationships achieved through non-government organisations & faith group meetings. Key community contacts are updated and involved in the work to disrupt and detect organised immigration crime with a focus on spreading key messages via social media and community groups.
- Children's Social Care have incorporated contextual safeguarding prompts within the child exploitation (CE) risk and vulnerability assessment and a contextual safeguarding approach is considered when making safety plans for children at risk of exploitation. Risk Management Meetings review cases of those reported as missing, assessed as high risk, or currently being exploited.
- Training in contextual safeguarding is being rolled out to all Children's Services practitioners, school governors and partnership members. Champions are available to assist practitioners on the wider thinking of safeguarding children using this approach.

2.6 Thurrock's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2020/23 (Appendix 3) recognises the response we can offer when finding victims and perpetrators of modern day slavery and human trafficking. Our main focus would be in the preventative and positive community objectives, but we have a lot to learn from the statistics of these crimes across Essex. The following data was provided by the Essex Police Modern Slavery Team for the 2020 Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment:

- In the year to 6th December 2020 there were 80 referrals into the National Referral Mechanism by Essex Police. In addition to that, 228 MS1/DTN (Duty To Notify) forms were completed. The MS1/DTN form serves to notify the Home Office of a suspected victim of MS/HT who is, however, not engaging with the NRM process.
- Nationally, there was a 33% increase in referrals in Quarter 1 2020 in comparison to the same period in 2019. The top 5 nationalities were British, Romanian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Polish and the top types were Criminal, Labour and Sexual Exploitation.
- Pandemic restrictions did impact this vulnerable group as restrictions affected the prevalent business types i.e. nail bars and building/home renovations. In some cases, victims may have increased acceptance of unsafe work and home conditions or decreased pay or received no pay at all.
- Exploitation probably continued but changed operational methods or exploitation types, such as exploitation of the Furlough scheme where exploiters may have claimed grants but passed this onto workers.
- NGOs and partners have responded to the pandemic impact by moving support online and utilising technology where possible. However, there are still gaps in understanding the impact of the pandemic on victims, such as displacement to new work/living conditions and arrangements,

changes to existing exploitation operating methods and health and care implications for any victims who have contracted Covid19. Ongoing restrictions are likely to hinder understanding of the changing MSHT landscape.

- The risks identified and monitored in relation to Brexit did not materialise

2.7 Local authorities are central to the fight against modern slavery and with this in mind we have drafted a statement for consideration by members in order to ensure that the supply chains we procure from are free from modern slavery. Our draft statement is attached at Appendix 4.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The LGA have produced guidance for local authorities ensuring that Councils have a key role to play in tackling modern slavery, including in identifying and supporting victims and working in partnership locally. Councils' role can be separated into four distinct areas:

- Identification and referral of victims
- Supporting victims – this can be through safeguarding children and adults with care and support needs and through housing/homelessness services
- Community safety services and disruption activities
- Ensuring that the supply chains councils procure from are free from modern slavery.

The committee can assure itself against those four areas as follows:

Theme	Requirement	Current Activity	Next Steps
Identification and referral of victims	Section 52 of the Act imposes a duty on public authorities, including local authorities, to notify the Secretary of State of suspected victims of slavery or human trafficking.	The existing training is primarily for frontline practitioners and is delivered online by an external organisation due to national covid-19 restrictions. The training not only raises awareness of the duty, but also how to identify, refer and support victims. 2 sessions hosted of the 'free your mind' training, by Raa Raa theatre. Free e-learning promoted by Adult safeguarding Modern Slavery	CSP will be hosting more training this year, hoping to carry out a staff knowledge survey to assess needs. We will support Anti-Slavery day 18 th October
Supporting victims	We will continue to review internal documentation to ensure it reflects modern slavery and human trafficking awareness and signposting where appropriate	This policy is in place through Southend, Essex and Thurrock guidance <u>Human Trafficking Policy (essexsab.org.uk)</u> Justice in care provide independent advocacy to help	Support the development of a SET wide Modern Day Slavery Policy and one minute guide Victim care pathway

		victims navigate the NRM and services, ensuring that victims have end to end support.	multiagency exercise day to be arranged
Community safety services and disruption activities	Progression of the modern slavery actions within the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy in partnership with Essex Police and third sector colleagues.	Actions in relation to MDS identified within the 3 year VAWG action plan We attended the first Anti-slavery Easter Region Partnership meeting in Jan 2020 which hasn't progressed due to COVID restrictions	Continue to progress identified actions
Community safety services and disruption activities	Continue to explore collaborative communication opportunities with our colleagues and partners across Essex on modern slavery and human trafficking, aiming to provide consistence messaging and response across Thurrock and wider Essex.	The police team consist of 2 x Detective sergeants, 8 x officers mainly detectives all with over 10 years' experience each and 4 x investigating officers They have recently delivered training to communities through the Independent Advisory Group	Trial of MDSHT newsletter for partners to keep topic at forefront of professionals minds
Ensuring that the supply chains councils procure from are free from modern slavery.	Good practice is to have a statement in relation to Modern Day Slavery	This has been drafted for sign off	Obtain sign off and promote

3.2 In addition following Op Melrose we are in discussion with the LGA regards a peer review of Organised Immigration Crime to identify best practice and embed learnings. The areas for future action have been identified as:

- It is seen as good practice for a local authority to produce an ethical statement on MDS and this has been shared with you in for information.
- We are working with the Adult Safeguarding Team and Childrens Social Care to be able to provide local data in relation to NRM referrals in the future.
- We are mindful of the increased risks that the Freeport may bring to OIC and potential impact on MDSHT of the Lower Thames Crossing.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To enable members to be satisfied with the response in place by Thurrock Council in respect of the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015.

- 4.2 This will enable Thurrock Council to be in line with the following guidance from the LGA: *Councils are currently under no legal obligation to publish statements in compliance with the Section 54 provision but this is soon about to change with [the Government's announcement](#) that public sector organisations, including local authorities and Fire and Rescue Services with a budget of £36m and above, will be included in the new provisions of the Modern Slavery Act when it is updated and amended later this year. The LGA also welcomes clarifications of the reporting requirements and the new online registry, which the sector has been actively involved with in the development stages.*

Councils are uniquely placed with the wide range of goods and services that we procure placing us the forefront of the fight against modern slavery - around 140 councils have already voluntarily compiled the transparency statements. The LGA is encouraging others to follow suit with a range of guidance and support for those wishing to submit a statement, including a simple aide memoire and a dynamic list of links to published council transparency statements.

- 4.3 To enable members to agree a process for monitoring of identified actions to ensure Thurrock Council fulfils its duty in relation to MDS Act 2015.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The purpose of bringing this report to the HEHC is for scrutiny by members.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This work will support delivery in relation to Thurrock Council's priority of:

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together
- 6.2 In ensuring that Thurrock Council fulfil their statutory duties outlined in the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015 we can be confident in processes in relation to safeguarding adults and Childrens and referrals to appropriate supporting organisations

6.3 The priorities for the Community Safety Partnership for 2021/22 include the following in relation to MDSHT:

Priority 1. Violence Against Women and Girls – encompassing: sexual violence, abuse and exploitation; stalking; sexual harassment; modern day slavery and human trafficking; domestic abuse; female genital mutilation (FGM); forced marriage and so called “Honour” based abuse of all genders
This will be achieved through:

- Positive Communities
- Prevention
- Partnership
- Provision and
- Protection

Priority 2. Tackling Violence and Vulnerability

- Raise awareness of Human Trafficking, Modern Day Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising from this report

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Members have the opportunity to scrutinise the Council’s arrangements through this process in line with the guidance.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

There are no direct implications in relation to diversity and equality from this report. The VAWG strategy has an Equality Impact Assessment in place.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, Health Inequalities, and Impact on Looked After Children

This report will support Members in ensuring that they are delivering on Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Community Safety Partnership strategic assessment.

Training link: [20-056 - Home Office - Modern slavery \(policingslavery.co.uk\)](https://www.policingslavery.co.uk/20-056-Home-Office-Modern-slavery)

9. **Appendices:**

1. Appendix 1: Councillor's Guide to Tackling Modern Slavery ([Councillor guide to tackling modern slavery | Local Government Association](#))
2. Appendix 2 – Modern Day Slavery
<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety/modern-slavery>
3. Appendix 3 - Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2020-23
4. Appendix 4 - Draft MDS statement

Report Author:

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