

<b>4 October 2022</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee</b>		
<b>Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking Update Report</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Bosa Osunde, Strategic Lead, Social Work Support		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Les Billingham, Asst Director ASC, and Communities		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Julie Rogers, Director of Public Realm		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides members of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Committee with details of Thurrock Council's response to Modern Day Slavery (MDS) and Human Trafficking (HT). The two are intricately 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 Councils Social Care and safeguarding teams in both Adults and Children's Services along with the Community Safety Partnership have a key 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. This is via the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process. Where adults do not provide consent to be referred there is a Duty to Notify (DtN) placed on the public authority.

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 an MDS transparency statement, this will be included in the new provisions of the Modern Slavery Act when it is updated and amended. By voluntarily completing a

transparency statement, we are demonstrating awareness and ethical leadership and following good practice. The statement can be viewed on Thurrock Council's website *Appendix 1*.

Thurrock is not unique and like many other areas 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 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 (Local Government Association) document "Councillor Guide to Tackling MDS" (*Appendix 2*) identifies the role councillors can play to help tackle this issue and are broadly summed up as the following 2 aspects<sup>1</sup>:

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. Recommendation(s):**

**1.1 That Members approve the 3-year approach and delivery plan.**

**1.2 That Members champion the MDS agenda and act as key stakeholders in being the eyes and ears of our communities and continue to raise awareness of this issue**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Modern Day Slavery remains a priority of the UK government and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, which is currently in an interim period as we await the appointment of a new commissioner. The government estimated the number of potential victims as 10,000 to 13,000 in 2013. More recently the Global Slavery Index, using a different methodology suggested that there were 136,000 victims of slavery in the UK in 2018.

2.2 The Office for National Statistics recognise that because of its hidden nature, producing an accurate measure of prevalence for these crimes is incredibly difficult. Currently there is no definitive source of data or suitable method

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<sup>1</sup> In forward by Councillor Simon Blackburn Chair, LGA Safer Stronger Communities Board

available to accurately quantify the number of victims of modern slavery in the UK. Instead, they produce a range of data to help better understand the extent and nature of these crimes. According to the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) hospitality, care, construction, agriculture, beauty services and manufacturing are all considered, among others, to be high-risk industries for labour exploitation in the UK.

- 2.3 In 2020 the Modern Slavery Helpline received 6,052 calls, 1,924 webforms and App submissions. From these contacts, 3,481 potential victims were indicated, 1,742 modern slavery cases raised, and 1,582 referrals sent to law enforcement agencies, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and safeguarding teams. A considerable proportion of calls into the Helpline remain related to wider abuse and exploitation, such as labour abuse and domestic violence. The pandemic affected the ability of individuals to reach out for support, as reflected in these figures which are lower than the 2019 statistics. The sharpest decrease in calls coincided with the first national lockdown commencing in March 2020.
- 2.4 The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is used to identify and refer potential victims of modern slavery and make sure they receive appropriate support. The number of potential modern slavery victims who received a positive reasonable grounds decision within the NRM nationally is rising. In 2021, the NRM received 12,727 referrals of potential victims of modern slavery.<sup>2</sup> This represents a 20% increase in referrals compared to the preceding year (10,601). This year saw the highest number of referrals since the NRM began.

Of all referrals this year, 50% (6,411) were for potential victims who claimed exploitation as adults (compared to 48% in the preceding year), whilst 43% (5,468) claimed exploitation as children (Figure 2). The age group at exploitation was unknown in 7% of cases (848).

- 2.5 The priority of modern-day slavery is reflected at a local level within the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership:

**Priority 7: Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime.**

- 2.6 This committee have previously provided direction to this priority which has resulted in the creation of a standalone 3-year strategy for MDS in Thurrock. The Modern Day Slavery Strategy and delivery plan 2022-25 has been agreed across 3 Partnership Boards: CSP (Community Safety Partnership), LSCP (Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership) & TSAB (Thurrock Safeguarding Adults Board). This offers strategic oversight and commitment on the shared interest of safeguarding across the Boards priorities.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021#:~:text=2.1%20Number%20of%20referrals%20by,the%20preceding%20year%20\(10%2C601\).](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2021#:~:text=2.1%20Number%20of%20referrals%20by,the%20preceding%20year%20(10%2C601).)

- 2.7 This refreshed Strategy sets out Thurrock's approach to tackling modern day slavery and duties under the Modern Slavery Act (MDS) 2015. MDS is an umbrella term covering many forms, including Human trafficking, Forced Labour, Domestic Servitude, Sexual exploitation, and Organ Harvesting. The strategy is underpinned by a supporting delivery plan.
- 2.8 The priorities are:
1. Empowered communities to participate and engage in tackling modern slavery and trafficking.
  2. Increased training awareness and understanding of modern slavery, human trafficking, and exploitation.
  3. Strengthened partnerships and outreach to Thurrock businesses to ensure ethical trading practices
  4. Increased support and protection for people who are being exploited, and those at risk of exploitation.
  5. Greater success in detection, disruption, and prosecution.
- 2.9 The strategy adopts the 4P approach to achieve the objectives:
- 2.9.1 Prevent – preventing people from engaging in modern slavery.
- 2.9.2 Pursue – prosecuting and disrupting individuals and groups responsible for modern slavery.
- 2.9.3 Protect – strengthening safeguards against modern slavery by protecting vulnerable people from exploitation and increasing awareness and resilience against this crime.
- 2.9.4 Prepare – reducing the harm caused by modern slavery through improved victim identification and enhanced support and protection.
- 2.10 Thurrock Council have published a Modern Slavery Transparency Statement (*Appendix 1*). The requirement of these statements will only apply to larger businesses with an annual turnover threshold of £36 million or more. Nationally, SMEs (small and medium businesses) make up 99% of all UK businesses and employ 16.8 million people. Understandably, they are more restricted in terms of resources they can dedicate to mitigating the risk of modern slavery in their operations. Our delivery plan outlines how Thurrock Council plan to support these businesses operating in the Borough. Activity examples includes a similar ethos to central government. Working with our communications team we will be encouraging these businesses to sign up to a transparency statement and recognise and celebrate those that do so. Furthermore, we will encourage all to make use of the Modern Slavery SME Toolkit which was designed specifically for this sector.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stopthetraffik.org/sme-toolkit/>

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 Since the introduction of the new strategy, there have been many achievements to date:
  - 3.1.1 A regular training programme has been scheduled, providing an overview of types and signs of exploitation, what the barriers to reporting maybe for victims and the action required by professionals to deliver an effective response. This is delivered by partners such as Essex Police and Justice and Care - 64 individuals have attended 4 sessions. This includes attendance from adult social care staff. Sessions are currently scheduled until January 2023.
  - 3.1.2 To offer consistency and collaboration across documentation, a Southend, Essex & Thurrock Modern Slavery 1 minute guide has been completed.
  - 3.1.3 In June 2022, a partnership joint operation with Essex Police, and Trading Standards was completed to inspect car washes through Op Aidant. There were no concerns found.
  - 3.1.4 The SME toolkit was promoted in Business Buzz newsletter which has a large distribution list to hundreds of business contacts in the borough.
- 3.2 The delivery plan is a 3-year action plan. Key activity planned to March 2023 is:
  - 3.2.1 A partnership event on 19th October. This event will share the latest updates and guidance from leading experts on tackling modern slavery. It will provide practical information on what to do if individuals come across a case of modern slavery. There will be an opportunity to discuss a case of modern slavery and highlight where victims can access support. The event will also increase awareness of the resources available and provide valuable networking opportunities with colleagues in other agencies.
  - 3.2.2 Communications will be key to get our message out to communities on Anti-Slavery Day – 18 October, providing us with the opportunity to engage with the public during that week at a pop-up event raising the profile within communities.
  - 3.2.3 Develop a draft Thurrock MDS pathway for first responder and professionals who are made aware of a potential victim of MDS/human trafficking.
  - 3.2.4 Promote the Landlord's guide to tackling modern day slavery, to reduce the risk of it in their properties. Private housing teams to carry out checks to properties with partners.
- 3.3 Activity to March 2025 will see a focus on understanding the data and intelligence available to ensure that multi-agency operations are effectively targeted. Focus will also look at policies and resources to ensure they are fit

for purpose. The work in year one on awareness training and engagement with the public and businesses will continue to develop.

3.4 The following risks are highlighted to members for awareness:

3.4.1 As outlined in the Home Office Delivery plan 2021/22 <sup>4</sup>: Police and support services need to be ready to respond to additional demand that could arise from increased reporting of crimes that have been traditionally under-reported, like modern slavery, violence against women and girls, and domestic abuse.

3.4.2 Thurrock has 3 ports and borders national road network and has been identified as a hot spot for Organised Immigration Crime.

3.4.3 There is a continued risk that there are unidentified victims of Human Trafficking within Thurrock.

3.4.4 The current cost of living crisis may exacerbate the number of individuals who unwittingly get caught up in modern day slavery. British victims tend to have fallen on challenging times, making them vulnerable to exploitation, including well-paid work with promises of accommodation, and for young people being caught up in the trafficking of drugs across County Lines.

3.4.5 Without taking the appropriate precautions, modern slavery can occur within local Thurrock businesses without them even knowing. If this happens, the reputation of the businesses can be negatively affected, and they might find themselves caught in a criminal investigation. In 2020, there were alleged cases of modern slavery occurring in Leicester apparel factories, multiple SMEs were caught up in a labour exploitation scandal. Unfortunately, scandals can affect businesses who never intended to cut corners or take advantage of workers but are still unwittingly exposed.

3.5 The Community Equality Impact Assessment (*Appendix 3*) highlights the positive impact that this strategy will have on those that maybe more vulnerable due to their protected characteristic of Age, Disability, Risk of Forced Marriage, Pregnancy, Race, Sex or due to deprivation.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 To enable members to be satisfied with the response to MDS by Thurrock Council through the new dedicated strategy and delivery plan.

4.2 Members are key stakeholders in supporting us to raise awareness of this crime across all our communities.

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

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-outcome-delivery-plan/home-office-outcome-delivery-plan-2021-to-2022>

- 5.1 Our 3 year MDS Strategy has been developed following consultation with this committee
- 5.2 Thurrock Council are key partners within Op Bluebird and professionals from the Community Safety and Emergency Planning and Resilience team, as well as Adult and Childrens Social Care attend the Organised Immigration and Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Professionals meeting, which is chaired by Essex Police.

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

- 6.1 The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership is central to delivering 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 The Community Safety Partnership has responsibility to deliver on Domain 6 of Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022/26 in relation to **'Community Safety'**.

The aims and ambitions of Domain 6 are:

- **Thurrock is a place where people feel and are safe to live, socialise, work and visit.**
- **We will also ensure that victims/survivors of crime are able to access support to cope and recover from their experiences, should they need it.**

- 6.3 This strategy and delivery plan will deliver on Priority 7 of the Community Safety Partnership Delivery Plan 2022/23:  
**Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime**

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

There are currently no financial implications, £1,000 has been allocated from the Community Safety Partnership funds for 22/23. Thurrock Adult Safeguarding Board are funding the partnership event in October.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is the key legislation relating to the modern slavery and sets out the relevant criminal offences, prevention orders, the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the obligations on organisations. The Act is supported by various regulations and statutory guidance. The Council is under a duty under Section 52 of the Act to notify the Home Office when they come across potential victims of modern slavery. It is also under duties to safeguard child and vulnerable adults who may be involved in modern slavery. There is no current legal obligation to produce a Modern Slavery Transparency Statement, but this may be introduced in legislation in the future.

The report enables the Committee to review and monitor how the Council is fulfilling its duties in relation to Modern Day Slavery.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Due to the very nature of this crime, that of a vulnerable person being exploited and completely controlled by someone else and one which is a global problem that transcends age, gender, and ethnicities all aspects of the delivery of this strategy will support those disadvantaged due to their protected characteristic.

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

This strategy will have a positive impact on safeguarding those vulnerable to exploitation

## 8. Background papers used in preparing the report: N/A

## 9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Statement
- Appendix 2: Strategy
- Appendix 3: Community Equality Impact Assessment

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