

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 January 2021
Reporting officer: Strategic Manager (Community Safety Unit)
Subject: Tackling Modern Slavery – Progress Report

Purpose and summary of the report:

This report provides the Committee with details of progress being made in tackling modern slavery in the Borough, the Committee having received a presentation on this issue from Kent Police and having considered the Council's new Modern Slavery Strategy at its last meeting in October 2020.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- i) Consider and comment upon the content of the Strategy.

1. Launch of Gravesham's Modern Slavery Strategy

- 1.1 At the last meeting of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee in October 2020, Members were provided with the Council's first dedicated Strategy to tackle modern slavery in the Borough. The Strategy was formally launched in October to coincide with National Anti-Slavery Day helping to raise awareness of the issue and encourage anyone experiencing modern slavery directly or any third party who believes that modern slavery may be taking place to report it. This report provides the Committee with a brief update on the progress that has been made in the last two months.
- 1.2 Encouraging debate about modern slavery in all its forms is very important and therefore, publicising the work that is taking place locally not only serves to reassure the public generally that the Council and partner agencies are being proactive in trying to support victims but also to raise awareness more broadly in order that local people will be better able to spot the signs and have the confidence to report their concerns. Launching the Modern Slavery Strategy to coincide with National Anti-Slavery Day was useful in that it potentially prompted greater media coverage than might otherwise have been achieved. A copy of the extensive article that appeared in the Gravesend Messenger is attached for information as Appendix 2a and 2b.
- 1.3 The winter edition of Your Borough magazine, delivered to all households across the Borough, was seen as another opportunity to bring this issue to people's attention. A copy of the article that appeared in the magazine is attached as Appendix 3.

2. The CSP Modern Slavery Working Group

- 2.1 To ensure that the Modern Slavery Strategy can be successfully implemented a multi-agency Modern Slavery Working Group has been established. The work of the Group is coordinated by the Council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) and is chaired by the Unit's

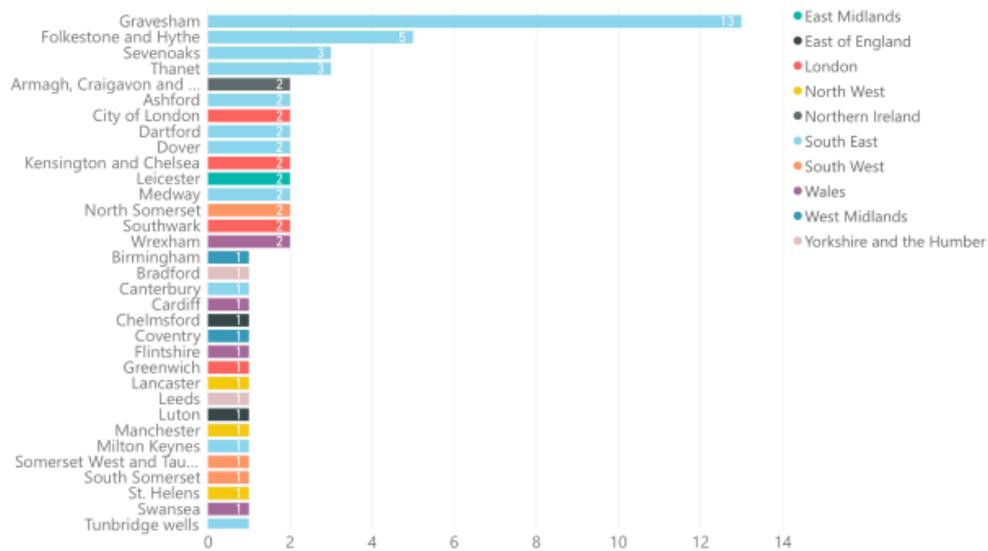
Lead Safeguarding Officer. The Vice-Chair is a colleague from Porchlight (the local charity dealing with homelessness in Gravesham) as the charity is a key partner in this work and has considerable contact with vulnerable people who are at greater risk of different types of exploitation that fall within the definition of modern slavery.

- 2.2 Since the last Committee meeting, Terms of Reference have been created for the Modern Slavery Working Group (attached as Appendix 4) and the Group held its first meeting in December 2020, with the next meeting already scheduled for late January 2021. This was extremely positive and a very encouraging start to what will be a longer-term initiative. As far as we are aware, Gravesham is the only District in Kent to have produced a dedicated strategy to tackle modern slavery and we will be sharing details of the steps we take and any lessons we learn with other areas to aid good practice.
- 2.3 A detailed action plan has been developed to support the delivery of the strategy and that the Working Group are using to structure its activity and record outcomes. Progress reports will be provided to the Community Safety Partnership on a quarterly basis and to the Council's Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee. The first step has been to try to pool information held by the different partners so that we can have a better understanding of the extent of the problem locally and the types of exploitation that are particularly prominent. Currently, labour exploitation appears to be the primary strand of modern slavery in Gravesham with victims often tied to their exploiter because they also provide their accommodation, having no other sources of income and having become 'indebted'. The Council's Lead Safeguarding Officer is also currently reviewing all our internal policies and procedures in order that we have defined lines of responsibility and clarity on steps to follow when cases come to light so that any delay in acting is avoided.

3. Local cases

- 3.1 The development of the Strategy and the Working Group has already strengthened joint working and the sharing of intelligence between partner agencies. The CSU are in regular contact with Porchlight colleagues who have been fundamental in helping to identify vulnerable people who are potential victims of modern slavery and with Kent Police colleagues who lead on Modern Slavery. The CSU and the Council's Housing Services have been actively in supporting several people believed to be victims of labour exploitation.
- 3.2 National Mechanism Referrals (to report these cases to the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit) have been completed, assessed and given 'Reasonable Grounds' decisions i.e. there are reasonable grounds on the basis of the details provided that the individuals are considered potential victims of modern slavery. These individuals have been housed outside of the Borough and are being supported until a final decision on their status is received i.e. whether there are Conclusive Grounds that they are victims of modern slavery. Agencies are sharing as much information as possible to strengthen the evidence that may enable formal action to be taken against the suspected perpetrator believed to be responsible for the exploitation of these victims.
- 3.2 The proactive approach being taken locally is having an effect. Crisis (a national homelessness charity) has been funded by Central Government to collate details of cases to try to build a picture of reports of modern slavery taking place across the country (the TILI Project). The modern slavery cases reported to the Project for July-September 2020 are listed below by the Local Authority area in which they took place. This data is clearly very heavily influenced by the organisations that are collecting information for the Project (Porchlight is one) and does not necessarily reflect national trends or the prevalence of modern slavery in one area rather than another. It does however undoubtedly demonstrate the proactive approach being taken in identifying victims in Gravesham and the fact that these cases are being reported is extremely positive.

Number of cases by Local Authority area as reported to the TILI Project July-September 2020



3.3 A further early priority for the Working Group will be the development and delivery of training on both spotting the signs of modern slavery but also very importantly, how to report it and for Council staff and Members, the procedural steps to be followed, including how to complete an NRM referral. Given the current restrictions imposed due to Covid-19, officers will be considering how this training can be delivered on-line.

IMPLICATIONS	
Legal	The Council has a statutory obligation to work with partner agencies to address crime and ASB and SOC (Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Serious Organised Crime Act 2015). It has specific duties as a First Responder agency and as contained within s.52 Modern Slavery Act 2015.
Finance and Value for Money	Delivery of the Strategy has a resource implication in terms of officer time but this is being met through the current capacity within the CSU (Strategic Manager, Operational Manager, Lead Safeguarding Officer and Administrator) as part of daily CSU business. Some funding to support aspects of the project will be capable of being met through the CSU's annual working budget (and potentially through external funding subject to successful bids to the PCC (Crime Reduction Grant) and Central Government funding opportunities.
Risk assessment	Failure to have in place clearly understood procedures to effectively support a victim of modern slavery coming to our attention would carry the risk of also failing to meet our statutory responsibilities, place the victim at risk of further harm and potentially damage the reputation of the Council.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (OPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <u>personal data</u> or <u>special category data</u> or <u>criminal offence data</u>? Potentially but only in respect of individual cases at an operational level; no, in respect of the Strategy.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a., have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/a</p> <p>c. If no to question b., please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? No.</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? Yes – it will increase our ability to protect often the most vulnerable of people from harm and ensure that they have equal access to support and assistance.</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Business Plan	The Modern Slavery Strategy makes a direct contribution to improving public safety linked to People and Place in the Corporate Plan.
Crime and Disorder	The Strategy will form part of the Council's and the CSP's programme of work to improve community safety and protecting vulnerable people from harm.
Climate Change	None.
Digital/website website implications	None at this stage. There is an intention to develop a Modern Slavery Information Hub within the Community Safety section on the Council's website during 2021.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults is a high priority for the Council and partner agencies; work to address modern slavery contributes to the Authority's Safeguarding policy and could potentially be seen as a good practice model county-wide.