

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee
Date: 15 September 2020
Reporting officer: Strategic Manager (Community Safety Unit)
Subject: Draft Modern Slavery Strategy 2020-23

Purpose and summary of the report:

This report provides the Committee with a draft Strategy that aims to increase our understanding of modern slavery in our area and that offers an approach that will enable the Council to fulfil its statutory obligations as a First Responder organisation. The Strategy supports the Council's wider Safeguarding agenda and will ensure that we have procedures in place that are robust and will withstand scrutiny.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- i) Consider and comment on the content of the draft Strategy prior to its finalisation, subject to amendments requested by and the formal approval of the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Modern Slavery Act 2015 introduced a range of measures to improve the level of protection offered to victims of slavery and to ensure that local agencies have the powers they need to pursue, disrupt and bring to justice those engaged in modern slavery, human trafficking, servitude and forced or compulsory labour.
- 1.2 s.52 of the Act created a new 'duty to notify' for Local Authorities i.e. a duty to report a potential victim of slavery or trafficking to the Home Office through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the current process in the UK for victim identification and support. This process also identifies Councils as First Responders (together with other public bodies including Police, UK Border Force, the Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority and several NGOs including the Salvation Army). Therefore, as a First Responder, our Council has a duty to notify the Home Office if anyone working within the Council (including Members) identifies a person with indicators suggesting that they may have been trafficked or are enslaved. The draft Strategy provides full details of our legal responsibilities both in respect of the duty to notify and the support that then needs to be provided to the potential victim.
- 1.3 The Strategy outlines specific measures that will ensure that good practice is being adopted and developed to improve our capacity as a First Responder organisation to react promptly and with clarity when cases come to light. It is intended as a fully-coordinated approach that is built upon the 4 Ps framework stipulated in the Government's Modern Slavery Strategy: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare. A number of strategic priorities and objectives that address each of the 4 Ps are contained within the Strategy.

2. The need for a new approach

- 2.1 Since the coming into force of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Council has been proactive in taking on board its responsibilities. Several cycles of training have been organised by the Community Safety Unit and successfully delivered by the charity, Stop The Traffik, to frontline Council staff and representatives of partner agencies. The Council has also produced and published, on an annual basis, a Modern Slavery Statement explaining the steps the Council takes to avoid the presence of modern slavery in any of its supply chains. Modern slavery and trafficking feature within the Council's internal Safeguarding Policy and the issue has consistently been retained as a priority within the Dartford and Gravesham Community Safety Partnership's Community Safety Strategy.
- 2.2 However, modern slavery remains (both nationally and locally) a largely hidden crime and the full extent of it is unknown, a matter largely exacerbated by the reluctance of victims, for a host of reasons provided in the proposed Strategy, to report their experiences. There also remains a lack of appreciation amongst the general public that this type of criminality is not a thing of the past but is in fact a form of organised crime that is extremely lucrative for perpetrators and that continues to grow. In order to encourage more victims to come forward and for third parties to report, it is imperative that First Responder agencies have very clear and effective procedures and support pathways in place if a victim comes to attention. In the absence of these, a victim will lack confidence in our ability to help them. They will frequently go underground and consequently, continue to suffer their abuse.
- 2.3 Historically, when Council officers have encountered a potential victim, this has usually been reported to Kent Police who have then investigated and supported the victim. The proposed Strategy adopts the stance that, if we are the first agency to come across the victim, it is our responsibility to follow the NRM process as a First Responder. This Strategy will ensure that we have the necessary procedures in place to enable us to do this efficiently but also to meet the Government's wider expectations of good practice in respect of raising awareness of modern slavery more generally, working collaboratively with partner agencies across sectors to provide victim support and to share intelligence with the aim of identifying perpetrators, disrupting their activity and bringing them to justice.
- 2.4 The Community Safety Unit and Housing Services recently reviewed our existing practices and determined that we wanted to extend and build upon work carried out to date to meet our First Responder responsibilities. It was agreed that it would be timely to take stock of what has worked well and to identify gaps in order to improve our response further. The proposed Strategy provides the Council with a comprehensive approach and a series of initiatives to be completed by the end of March 2023 that will demonstrate that we have taken the best of good practice and replicated it locally and fully adopted Government guidance.
- 2.5 The Strategic Manager (Community Safety Unit) and the Assistant Director (Housing Services) have consulted with colleagues from the Kent Police Serious Crime Directorate and Porchlight (Homelessness charity) and the proposed Strategy has been produced with their assistance and support. Subject to the approval of the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure, it is hoped that the Strategy can be launched in October to coincide with National Anti-Slavery Day 2020. This may attract some publicity which whilst clearly positive in showing the Council to be acting proactively, will also provide an opportunity to raise awareness of modern slavery amongst the general public and help to generate a dialogue and discussion about the issue.
- 2.6 The Strategy itself provides details in respect of governance, accountability and how the Strategy would be delivered at an operational level.

3. Implementation

- 3.1 The successful implementation of the Strategy will require the support of a multi-agency Working Group. The Community Safety Unit (Strategic Manager) has already been in consultation with a core group of key partners who have expressed their willingness to be involved in this new project. The Unit will take responsibility for coordinating and administering the quarterly meetings of the Working Group and the project will be led by the Strategic Manager and the CSU's Lead Safeguarding Officer on behalf of the Council.
- 3.2 A detailed Action Plan based on the priorities and objectives contained within the Strategy will be developed that will structure the activity of the Working Group and ensure that focus is retained. This will be a live working document (not for public dissemination) that will also enable progress to be regularly monitored and allow performance to be fed back to both the Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee and the Community Safety Partnership.
- 3.3 Much of the activity will not require additional financial resourcing and it is anticipated that funds available through the internal Community Safety Unit working budget will be able to accommodate any expenditure. Should it transpire that further funding is required than currently anticipated, the Community Safety Unit may request to use some of its Crime Reduction Grant available via the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office to support this initiative. Modern slavery and human trafficking have been flagged as issues of particular concern during the period of Covid-19 and lockdown; it is possible that Central Government may make funding available to support activity to address the issue in the not too distant future. In this event, having a Strategy in place and a multi-agency Working Group already established (including charitable organisations as well as statutory agencies) will place us in a good position to be able to bid for funding to support our work.

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 in pulling together the proposed Action Plan that will support the Strategy and coordination of activity. This will be 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 Strategy makes a direct contribution to improving public safety linked to People and Place in the Corporate Plan.
Crime and Disorder	The proposed Strategy will form part of the Council'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. Once launched the Strategy should be published on the Council's website.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults is a high priority for the Council and partner agencies; the proposed Strategy will contribute to the Authority's Safeguarding policy and could potentially be seen as a good practice model county-wide.