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COUNCIL TO WORK WITH POLICE AND CHARITY IN BID

New tactics in fight to end slavery as figures rise sharply

By Sean Delaney
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A new approach to tackling modern slavery is being launched in response to a sharp rise in the number of potential victims across north Kent.

Recorded figures are heavily affected by under-reporting due to the complex nature of

the issues and vulnerable individuals involved.

But statistics show a 45% year-on-year increase across the UK between January and September 2019 to 7,273 victims.

Trends in Kent mirror the national picture and are likely to share the same modern slavery and human trafficking issues, trends and intelligence gaps.

The latest figures are

provided at Kent Police North Divisional level, which covers Dartford, Gravesend, Medway and Swale. It shows 77 modern slavery and human trafficking investigations were carried out in the 12 months ending July this year.

Potential victims are identified nationally via the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a framework devised to capture and offer support to those at risk of human trafficking, forced labour, and/or sexual exploitation.

Adopting this measure, 199 NRM and modern slavery notifications were referred in the same year and 11 NRM referrals were made by local authorities, acting as "first responder" organisations, between April and June.

In response, a new strategy to tackle modern slavery in Gravesend was launched this week, to coincide with Sunday's

Anti-Slavery Day.

The plan, called Unhidden: Addressing Modern Slavery in Gravesend, has been produced by Gravesend council, working in conjunction with partners Kent Police and Porchlight, Kent's largest homeless and vulnerable people charity.

It sets out the council's approach to tackle the issue as it aims to be proactive in identifying and referring victims for help and safeguarding children and adults by helping to address their support needs.

Also included is a commitment to work with partners to disrupt perpetrators and bring them to justice and ensure that supply chains linked to council services are free from modern slavery.

Launching the strategy, Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesend council's cabinet member for community and leisure, said: "This demonstrates the council's real commitment to work with our partner agencies to provide the best support possible to potential victims who come to our attention."

"We recognise that, sadly, slavery, trafficking and exploitation are not issues of the past but very present in areas across the country including our own borough."

"The scale of this largely hidden crime is significant and that is why we need an approach that raises the awareness of it across the board."

The Labour councillor for the Coldharbour ward added that by working closely with partners, the council will continue to develop a programme of targeted action to encourage potential victims to report their experiences and get the help they need whilst also sending a clear message to offenders that these crimes will not be tolerated in Gravesend.

"The council will have no hesitation in using its powers and encouraging its partners to use theirs to do this," said Cllr Mochrie-Cox.

"Gravesend council, as well as Gravesend as a community, has a responsibility to ensure that its children, young people and adults are offered the best protection possible from exploitation of this kind which has devastating long-term effects on its victims, their families and the wider community."

The true scale of modern

