

TO AID VICTIMS AND BRING TRAFFICKERS TO JUSTICE



The vulnerable nature of victims of modern slavery means figures are often under reported

Picture: Kamronsky



Detective Inspector Kris Eberlein



Gravesham council has launched its new strategy



Gravesham Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox

slavery and human trafficking in the UK is unknown due to the complexity of the crimes.

Those exploited are often vulnerable, meaning meaning victims are frequently reluctant to report their experience, particularly to the police.

UK modern slavery reports dropped by a quarter during the coronavirus lockdown, according to the Home Office figures, but experts fear exploitation methods may have become more covert and masked many cases.

"The council will have no hesitation in using its powers and encouraging its partners to use theirs to do this."

Data obtained by Kent Police indicates the most prevalent forms in north Kent are forced criminality, labour and sexual exploitation.

Victims were most likely to be British, Albanian, Romanian, Polish or Vietnamese.

It should be noted forced criminality linked to county lines gangs - which is

reported to have jumped in terms of child exploitation during lockdown - is removed from these statistics as there are separate teams dedicated to tackling these issues.

Paul Withrington, who manages Porchlight's homelessness outreach services in the area, said: "As a homelessness charity, we sadly encounter many victims of modern slavery."

"Some have been cast on to the streets by organised crime groups who can no longer profit from them. Others have fled their captors and have nowhere to stay."

"Porchlight staff are trained to spot the signs and get specialist support in place for survivors of slavery."

"We've shared our knowledge with Gravesham council, and we are glad to be working alongside the council and Kent Police to help everyone we can."

He went on to add modern slavery was an issue across the entire county, but said by working together to encourage victims to come forward and share their stories they could stop the exploitation of vulnerable people.

Detective Inspector Kris Eberlein of Kent Police's serious organised crime department, said: "Human trafficking and modern day slavery have no place in our society and we are committed to pursuing those who are responsible for the exploitation of

others. In recent years, we have worked closely with our partners and our combined resources have helped identify and protect vulnerable people.

"We have also achieved meaningful results for victims in the courts but recognise offending of this nature is likely to be under-reported."

"No one should have to endure working in servitude and we will continue to work with our partners to identify and target the perpetrators of such offending."

"I would also encourage the public to familiarise themselves with the potential signs of modern day slavery and, where necessary, make a report."

While the signs can be hard to identify, there are various which could indicate a situation of exploitation that you can be aware of.

These include someone who appears to be under the control of someone else and reluctant to interact with others, does not have personal identification, or is not able to move around freely.

They may also possess few personal belongings or wear the same clothes every day.

Other signs someone could be in slavery are they appear reluctant to talk to strangers or the authorities, appear frightened or withdrawn, or may be dropped off and collected for work in the same way at unusual times of the day or night.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

To report a suspicion or seek advice, call the Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 0121700 or police on 101. You can also contact a number of other organisations including Crimestoppers, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and Anti-Slavery International.

Four on people smuggling charges

Four men have been charged with people smuggling offences.

They were arrested close to the A2 Cobham services near Gravesend on Friday as part of an investigation by the National Crime Agency.

Two Albanian brothers - Arben Cakici, 48, and Astrit Cakici, 37, from Barking and Newham - who were living illegally in the UK, have been charged with facilitating illegal entry into the UK and possessing a firearm. Arben Cakici also faces a charge for carrying a knife.

The arrests were made at 8am after witnesses saw four people being taken out of a lorry and put into two cars.

Two Romanian lorry drivers - Ionut

Colibei, 34, and Valerica Prutearu, 41, - have also been charged with facilitating illegal entry into the UK with Colibei additionally charged for being in possession of a knife.

The four men appeared at a virtual court on Monday. All were remanded in custody to appear at Maidstone Crown Court on November 16.

Following the arrests, searches in Newham on Friday also led to a further arrest of a 45-year-old man from Albania, wanted for unrelated offences of common assault and breach of bail conditions.

Four Albanians, aged between 20 to 35, are now being dealt with by Immigration Enforcement.



Four men were arrested near the A2 Cobham services near Gravesend

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