

## Modern Slavery and Homelessness Partnership Conference Report

### Introduction

Mark Burns-Williamson, West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) is the lead for Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery nationally. On Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) held a conference on Modern Slavery and the links to Homelessness. Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery is a priority in the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan.

The event welcomed 106 delegates working across sectors including law enforcement, local authority, health, NGO's, third sector, as well as members of the West Yorkshire Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery Network.

### Keynote Speakers

We were joined by a number of keynote speakers at the event which represented the wide range of partnership organisations required to tackle homelessness and modern slavery.

Professor Andrew Ball Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise from the University of Huddersfield welcomed delegates to the university and discussed the importance of research into this topic conducted at the Secure Societies Institute (SSI). This included understanding the psychology and criminology of why perpetrators commit this offence, the economic climate in which it exists, the relevant laws and the measures which can be designed to tackle this crime.

Mark Burns-Williamson set the scene of the event and was encouraged by the number of delegates who had attended the event. He discussed the significant increase in homelessness and the need to better understand this issue and its link to Modern Slavery. He stated it was important to prevent people from being at risk of or becoming destitute and the gaps in support which currently exist for victims. The PCC felt a local partnership response was required to allow us to tackle the complexities of this issue.

Assistant Chief Constable Russ Foster of West Yorkshire Police (WYP) spoke about his role and the portfolio's which he holds including specialist crime, which human trafficking and modern slavery come under. He used a quote to describe offences of this kind as "Taking somebody's life, without killing them" and that WYP are committed as a force to tackle it. He said that identifying and investigating is rarely clear cut and that they will continue to improve how they support vulnerable victims including proactively seeking out homeless people and educating frontline officers to recognise the links to modern slavery.

Andrew Smith, Founder and Chief Executive of Hull Homeless provided delegates with a background of his career in the forces and his personal battles which had drawn him to work in this field. He introduced the topic of Homelessness and elaborated on the 'hidden homeless'; those rough sleeping, in temporary accommodation or sofa surfing to name a few. He spoke about the need to understand vulnerabilities associated with homelessness including isolation and a lack of support networks which can cause a higher risk of exploitation. Homelessness can happen to anyone at any stage.

Andy Leonard, Modern Slavery Regional Co-ordinator for the Regional Organised Crime Unit gave delegates a law enforcement perspective and an insight into Operation Nosemay; where Polish people were exploited and

targeted due to their homelessness. Its high reward as the monetary wealth created can be massive, and low risk due to the low chance of being prosecuted, plus the fact that there is little or no rivalry from other crime gangs. He stated that in some cases rough sleepers are actively targeted and approached face to face by perpetrators.

Gordon Laing, General Manager of Simon On The Streets provided further information on their organisation and the scale of rough sleeping in West Yorkshire. He reiterated that rough sleeping is only one element of homelessness and that the true picture of the 'hidden homeless' is unknown. He said that their organisation was lucky enough to be inundated with volunteers and that their work focused on outreach work to target those who don't engage with other services. He provided an alternative insight to the suffering faced by destitute people and a discussion point for delegates being 'Is being trafficked any worse than living on the street?'

Finally, Phillipa Roberts the Director of Legal Policy at Hope for Justice provided delegates with information on the Homelessness Reduction Act and the need to support victims. She discussed the 'cliff drop' of support following the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and that advocates, such as those working for Hope for Justice, can give victims and survivors a voice and a choice. They can guide their understanding and reduce the risk of them being re-trafficked but also increase their resilience. She guided delegates through international obligations, domestic law; the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Care Act 2014 and other relevant case law.

## **Q&A Panel**

Delegates had the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers. A brief overview is as follows:

### **1. What effect will Brexit have on this issue?**

Andrew Smith responded by saying it will make a huge difference on the ground and that service users are already struggling to understand their rights and fear is already affecting their choices. He felt if people lost the right to reside and free movement there would be a huge increase in the number of people who become destitute. He said a question to ask of the government would be who will be picking this up?

Andrew Leonard answered and said initially it would impact on the number of people who come to the country but this would provide traffickers with another form of control by allowing them to threaten the victim with immigration services. He also added that it could be a potential disaster when investigating crimes across borders.

Phillipa said that the Victim Care Bill was supportive of ongoing entitlements and this would reduce the 'revolving door' that some are currently facing.

Mark stated it was difficult to tell as the picture changes day by day due to ongoing negotiations. He informed delegates that the APCC had written to the home secretary to raise their concerns for law and enforcement but there may be more questions to raise based on the discussions that had taken place that day.

### **2. Can we do something collectively about the challenge with the 5 days of the NRM and decide who's paying?**

Phillipa felt that local authorities needed to work together and decide which areas needed it (as it might not be required for all) and share the budget to try and meet the need.

Andrew Smith said there needed to be an emergency response as when working with vulnerable people you can't put a time frame on it and if they're at risk the priority should be to keep that person safe. He said the pathway needs to exist straight away such as an internal directory of agencies who can provide support in the first 5 days.

Mark answered that it was always difficult to solve problems when the answer requires resources. He felt West Yorkshire has the partnerships needed to work effectively together but we now require outreach work on our streets, towns and cities. Not all homeless people will be trafficked but the risk is increasing. He said it is very difficult in periods of austerity but partnership solutions have to be the way forward.

Andrew Leonard added that there was a 3 day period of accommodation provided before entering the NRM but it always a difficult to answer when it's about who is responsible for funding.

Andrew Smith then added that we were currently looking at the vulnerabilities separately, then deciding who was eligible to pay for that support. He was aware in other parts of the country local authorities were using empty fire stations as places of safety and asked whether in West Yorkshire there were any such buildings to utilise. A colleague from Wakefield Council said they were looking into a similar proposal but asked if they could work together and gain some guidance on what the emergency accommodation criteria was as they had had limitations presented previously (not near a city centre for example).

### **3. What do you feel is the role for private sector businesses in tackling modern slavery?**

Andrew Smith said that Corporate Social Responsibility should play a role in all businesses for their local communities. He said the third sector rely heavily on the commercial sector to keep their work going, but that the private sector can have a wider role in monitoring their supply chain and to ensure that staff are trained to spot the signs.

Mark informed colleagues that he had previously held an event for supply chains and the banking sector around highlighting suspicious activity. He said businesses need to know where they are sourcing products from and to provide avenues for referrals if they had concerns.

Andy Leonard added that businesses are often unwittingly employing victims of modern slavery but businesses should aim to have good people management skills and include things like English lessons, access to health and dental care, clean uniforms and to check where employee's income is paid and that they have access to their bank accounts.

Gordon added financial support is important but also supporting local charities by hosting their literature or signage to promote them is also valuable.

Phillipa stated businesses can provide a strong element of prevention; we can work with businesses to reduce their risk and educate them on how to identify victims. She said businesses can eliminate forced labour, or provide job opportunities for victims coming out of exploitation.

Andrew Smith added that the Cooperative supermarket offer 4 week placements for victims and survivors wanting to join the workplace. Further information on the Cooperative's Bright Futures programme is included below.

Mark added to Andrews point about Northern College, who the OPCC supported in the implementation of their 12 week residential placement for victims of modern slavery. A link to their website for further information is included below.

### **Case Study and Discussion**

The delegates were led by facilitators to work through a case study which had been anonymised from a real case to raise awareness of the links, challenges, and the nature and scale of the issue in both sectors.

### **A summary of the key discussion in relation to the case studies is as follows:**

#### **What further information would delegates want to ask the victim?**

- Further details about the victim (any ID, addresses or records)
- Further information about the perpetrator
- The victims age; there would be differences in support elements in place for adults and children
- Was there anyone else at risk or being victimised?
- Did the victim experience abuse as a child?
- Delegates felt it would be important to understand from the victim what they wanted the outcome to be; did they want the police to be involved or did they only want support at this stage?
- To find out from the victim whether they felt they had control of their situation?
- Identify other support services required for additions, sexual health etc.
- What aspect of support would be the priority for the victim? For example tackling the alcohol dependency at initial stage might not be the most helpful

#### **Did delegates feel there were any other organisations which needed to be involved that had not already been identified?**

- Delegates felt that the partnerships which existed in West Yorkshire were strong. The only limitation identified was that information was not shared well. They did feel that partnerships could be strengthened by allowing third sector agencies to be incentivised to work together to reduce competition
- An idea raised would be a triage funding agreement between the police, health and local authorities to support adults
- Third sector support services; following the 45 day period, there was felt to be a gap in knowledge of services which could support victims and survivors
- Social housing providers were identified as an organisation which should get 'more involved', and the need to work with providers who don't currently house victims and survivors of modern slavery to fill empty properties
- Health services and counselling for issues of sexual (SARC), mental or physical abuse suffered

#### **What ideas or partnership solutions could be offered on a West Yorkshire wide basis to provide victims with appropriate accommodation and wider support?**

- A commissioned West Yorkshire wide pathway to deliver support – learning from the other areas of abuse and vulnerability
- A single point of contact for the victim who can guide them through the process and put them in touch with all relevant services

- Robust information sharing – IT systems/communication/ advertising between agencies/central database of contacts
- Combined authorities approach for offering suitable accommodation which is supported
- Victim support referrals and mental health counselling

#### **How can we implement the solutions and overcome the challenges highlighted in this case study?**

- Joint commissioning of services between agencies
- Training and awareness raising with businesses, communities and service users to allow them to protect themselves
- An advocate role to be a single point of contact for victims and their needs

#### **Evaluation**

68 delegates completed an evaluation form following the event which the following data is based on.

The speaker satisfaction rate ranged from 94 – 65%. 76% of delegates valued the Question and Answer session with the panel. 90% of delegates felt both roundtable 1 and roundtable 2 were positive. 93% of delegates who completed an evaluation form felt the Overall event was positive.

#### **Next Steps:**

- To set up a Modern Slavery and Homelessness Sub Group of the Modern Slavery and Anti-Trafficking Network.

#### **Useful Links:**

- <https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/policy>
- <https://www.co-operative.coop/ethics/bright-future>
- <https://www.northern.ac.uk/freethinking/>