

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 19 September 2017

Attendance

Members of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Claymore
Cllr Barry Findlay
Cllr Malcolm Gwinnett
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Linda Leach (Chair)
Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Tersaim Singh

Witnesses

Chief Inspector Beth Bridges, West Midlands
Police

Employees

Dereck Francis
Earl Piggott-Smith
Karen Samuels
Pippa Thomas
David Watts

Democratic Services Officer
Scrutiny Officer
Head of Community Safety
Management Graduate Trainee
Director of Adults Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Elias Mattu and Patricia Patten.
- 2 **Declarations of Interest**
No declarations of interests were made.
- 3 **Minutes of previous meetings (13 June 2017)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 June 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

With reference to Minute No. 5 (Draft People Directorate Commissioning Strategy), members of the panel asked whether the issues they had raised on the draft Commissioning Strategy had been taken on board, and if so whether they would be receiving a copy of the finalised engagement documents prior to their circulation for the consultation exercise. David Watts, Director of Adults Services, confirmed that an easy read version of the draft Strategy was being developed. The Head of Commissioning was also redrafting the draft Strategy along the terms raised by the Panel.

The Director added that arrangements would be made for the panel to receive the final version of the draft strategy and the condensed version prior to its submission to Cabinet.

5 **Wolverhampton's Approach to Tackling Modern Slavery**

Pippa Thomas, Management Graduate Trainee, delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the Council's approach to tackling modern day slavery. The panel also received a detailed report on modern slavery and steps to develop the Council's and partnership response to modern day slavery in Wolverhampton.

The panel were invited to comment on the current draft modern slavery action plan delivered through the Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership (WASP) and the extent to which the Council was compliant with the provisions of the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#). City of Wolverhampton Council leads on efforts to tackle the issue of modern slavery locally.

The Panel asked whether the Government would provide new funding to local authorities or partner agencies to tackle the problem. Karen Samuels, Head of Community Safety, advised the panel that no extra funding was anticipated from Government to support the work.

The Head of Community Safety reported that the Government was reviewing the National Framework around its approach to modern slavery. The Council had fed into the Government consultation on proposed changes to national policy. The Council's approach was that any abuse was a safeguarding issue and the response to the situation needed to be looked at in those terms. The Council's corporate response was to therefore embed tackling modern slavery in its existing safeguarding procedures and to draw down on a national contract provided by the Salvation Army.

Chief Inspector Beth Bridges, West Midlands Police, was in attendance for this item. On the question of funding she added that WM Police was ready to deal with this issue. A central structure was in place and everyone in WM Police had some level of responsibility for tackling modern slavery as part of their role. WM Police could commit to this and would respond in terms of resources, as appropriate.

In response to other questions from the panel, the Chief Inspector reported on how the Police were alerted to the recently reported suspected cases of modern slavery at Ming Moons Chinese restaurant in Wolverhampton and the role local intelligence played in bringing the restaurant to their attention. Chief Inspector added that there was a need for the police to develop its intelligence networks in order respond to cases of this nature in the future.

The Chief Inspector also confirmed that calling the police would be the easiest way to report a suspected case of slavery. The panel were assured that all calls on this issue would be taken seriously by the police.

The Chief Inspector advised the panel that an online reporting tool had been soft launched during the summer and was scheduled to be fully launched in October 2017.

The Chief Inspector also responded to a question about concerns about the level of police resources within Wolverhampton and explained that policy for allocating resources was based on an assessment of policing demand and priorities.

The panel made the following observations on the report and the WASP draft modern slavery action plan 2017 and the draft City of Wolverhampton Council modern slavery implementation plan 2017-2018:

- Councillors would benefit from the e-learning training package if it could be enhanced for them. Discussions should take place with the Member Development Team to see what could be offered.
- In terms of cross border issues, it was worrying if agencies are aware of women who have been victimised but who are afraid to complain.
- Supported accommodation is an issue that needs to be considered as part of any multi agency response.
- The information sharing agreement underpins a lot of the partnership work and therefore it was essential that an agreement be put in place.
- The areas for improvement highlighted in the implementation plan require redrafting into specific outcomes.
- The questions the panel listed in the report were impossible for them to answer and suggested that members of the WASP and the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network should be asked to respond.

The panel queried where the Council was a year ago, in terms of the objectives and legal requirements set out in the two documents. The Head of Community Safety responded that the position a year ago, was unclear and that the current position should be viewed as the point on which to baseline future progress – the response to include an assessment about the current position and where it plans to be in a years' time. The panel were not clear where the enforcement and oversight of the Section 54 Statement referred to in the Modern Slavery Implementation Plan 2017-2018 would happen and further details were requested on this issue.

The Head of Community Safety reported that she had undertaken an assessment of the Council's approach to tackling modern slavery. The current position was reflected in the draft Implementation plan. The Head of Community Safety advised the panel that action owners responsible for delivering targets and clear timescales would be added. Head of Community Safety advised the panel that the document should be considered as being the start of a conversation with the agencies and service leads who had the knowledge and expertise on the subject. The Head of Community Safety reported that she would be happy to report back in 12 months on progress and where the Council stood in terms of its approach to tackling modern slavery.

In response to other questions, the Panel was informed that:

- Paragraph 2.3 of the report is just an example of the types of abuse. There was no suggestion that forced labour and organ harvesting are prevalent in Wolverhampton, however there is evidence of it happening nationally. There were also suggestions nationally of human traffickers involved in 'baby farming' to access benefits.
- The Head of Community Safety advised the panel that the City of Wolverhampton Council was further forward in terms of its approach to tackling modern slavery compared to other West Midlands Council's. However, there was acceptance that there was still a long way to go tackle the issue, which is often hidden. The work to date had been about setting the foundations for future action.
- The Council received national data on the types of abuse that are more prevalent. The National Crime Agency also produce quarterly reporting on its website. The National referral data is inadequate on the national level but the Council had to work with it. Anecdotally, at a WASP meeting partners were asked of their experiences of identifying victims. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) representative said they could identify two dozen potential victims on any given day but were not aware of systems for reporting concerns.
- The underreporting of actual or suspected case of modern day slavery is an issue. The Head of Community Safety commented that it is everyone's responsibility to be alert to the signs of modern slavery and to know how to report it. To support this, work, it was important for people to have an awareness of the issue and provide information. The reporting would improve with the provision of online reporting.
- The reason why a lot of the action plan is about raising awareness is because victims themselves do not necessarily recognise that they are victims. Their situation is a way of life to them and comparatively better than the experiences which made them to decide to leave their country of origin. The Chief Inspector added that although more work is needed to identify 'hidden victims' it is thought that the actual prevalence is still comparatively low.
- Eastern European males are being targeted and transported across the city/country to work for pay, but are of risk of exploitation.
- As the Council builds on the local intelligence picture the trends will become clearer. The Head of Community Safety added that it was important that the Council looked wider than its boundary in order see where the links are to modern slavery elsewhere.
- The Head of Community Safety advised the panel that in terms of people from abroad, if their right to stay in the country is being used against them by the people abusing them, it would be a safeguarding issue to be dealt with through the Council's safeguarding arrangements.
- The [Independent Commissioner for Slavery](#), Kevin Hyland, has a small team but no resources. The Independent Commissioner leads efforts nationally to tackle modern slavery and human trafficking. The issue of information sharing between organisations has been highlighted as a big issue.
- A desktop exercise on an 'end to end' walk through of a modern slavery case would shortly be taking place in Bilston. The Head of Community Safety added that it was hoped that the exercise would provide more insight into what needs to be put in place.

Resolved:

1. That a progress report be submitted to the panel in September 2018 on the progress made by the Council in its response to tackling modern slavery. The report to set out where we are now and expectations about where will be in terms of implementing the actions detailed in the Modern Slavery Implementation Plan 2017-2018.
2. That a paper on the outcome of the 'end to end' table top exercise on a modern slavery case be circulated to the panel together with information on the e-learning training package on modern slavery once more detail is available.
3. That the following questions be referred to Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership and the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network for a written response:
 - a. How well is the Council working with partners to prevent, and support victims of, human trafficking and modern slavery?
 - b. How is the Council encouraging the sharing of information between partners to pursue and bring to justice those facilitating human trafficking and modern slavery?
 - c. How is the Council engaging with local communities to raise awareness and encourage the reporting of any suspicious activity about this issue?
 - d. What best practice exists locally and nationally which could also be considered by the Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership (WASP) in their approach to preventing human trafficking and modern slavery?

The Head of Community Safety to collate responses and forward a draft to panel members. The Head of Community Safety to provide an update on progress to the panel meeting on 7 November 2017.