

# Modern slavery and victim support

## House of Commons

27 March 2019



### KEY MESSAGES

- Modern slavery affects both rural and urban areas. It can happen on the streets we live in, in the communities we are part of, and in the businesses we use.
- Councils have a responsibility to tackle modern slavery in their communities both as first responders to instances of modern slavery, providing services to victims, and as part of their procurement processes.
- The latest statistics from the National Crime Agency (NCA) show that the number of council referrals of suspected victims of modern slavery to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has risen from 153 in 2013 to 1342 in 2018.
- The increase in council referrals suggests both an increasing awareness of modern slavery and the growing issue of county lines drug trafficking, many cases of which are included in the NRM figures.
- The LGA and councils are engaging with the Home Office on reforms to the NRM, some of which are currently being piloted. Supporting these changes and growing numbers of victims over the longer term will require increased funding for key councils services victims may need, including housing, children's services and social care.
- Without increased funding, resources could become a significant barrier to being able to take forward further work on modern slavery and support victims appropriately. We estimate local authorities will face a funding gap of £8 billion by 2024/25.
- It is vital that the Government uses the 2019 Spending Review to deliver truly sustainable funding for local government. Investing in local services is good for the overall health, wellbeing and safety of our communities.

# Briefing

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **The role of councils in tackling modern slavery**

Councils have a significant role to play in tackling modern slavery. Their role can be divided into four different areas:

1. As first responders, identifying victims and referring them through the NRM
2. Providing safeguarding services to child victims and some adult victims when they exit the NRM, as well as potentially providing housing services
3. Community safety and disruption activities through a range of local government departments
4. Working to ensure that the supply chains that councils procure from are free from modern slavery

There are a wide number of issues that will have an impact on councils' ability to take forward further work on modern slavery, including, among others, issues around funding, different support systems for adults and children and situations where victims have no recourse to public funds.

### **Improving support for victims**

The safeguarding of child and adult victims of modern slavery is carried out under different legislation, meaning that there are different support systems for both child and adult victims. The disparity in centrally funded specialist support for victims is of concern.

#### *Child victims*

Across England and Wales, councils' children's services teams are under significant pressure. Councils currently start 500 child protection investigations every day,<sup>i</sup> and children's services face a £3 billion funding gap by 2025.<sup>ii</sup>

All child victims of modern slavery go through local authority safeguarding procedures when they are identified and referred into the NRM. Despite the current pressures children's services are under, no extra funding has been allocated to councils to support child victims of modern slavery. Under existing proposals for the Independent Child Trafficking Advocate (ICTA) service, one to one support will be available to unaccompanied children, while internally trafficked UK children will be supported through a regional service.

Child victims account for the significant majority of council referrals into the NRM: figures for 2013-18 shows that 2,737 children and 290 adults were referred by councils to the NRM between 2014 and 2018.<sup>iii</sup> These figures reflect the numbers of children referred into the NRM as suspected victims of country lines drug trafficking.

We are concerned by the growing number of children caught up in county lines activity, and as a result in serious violence as well. It has been reported that children as young as 10 are being groomed and recruited in to gangs who exploit them for their labour, for sex, and for their 'innocence' as children found to be conducting criminal activity will often receive a lesser sentence, especially if they have had no previous contact with law enforcement agencies.

Councils are playing their part in tackling this threat to our communities but without sustained funding for youth services and other local services our options to address the root causes of these activities are limited. We have called on the Government to do more to ensure that councils and local partners can work together to protect children from the dangers and vagaries of criminal gangs through a multi-agency, public health approach.

### *Adult victims*

By contrast, adults with a reasonable grounds decision receive specialist support through the Government-funded Salvation Army contract to provide support for victims of modern slavery. On leaving the NRM, victims may receive support through local adult safeguarding or housing services.

Adult victims may be identified as having care and support needs which require support through local adult safeguarding procedures. Where the council has reasonable cause to suspect that an adult in its area who has needs for care and support (whether these are being met or not), is experiencing or is at risk of abuse or neglect, and is unable to protect themselves from the abuse or neglect due to their needs, councils have a legal duty to that adult under the Care Act 2014. Specifically, Section 42 of the Care Act 2014 requires a local authority to undertake an enquiry in order to establish whether any action needs to be taken to prevent or stop abuse or neglect. Paragraph 14.17 of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance specifies that abuse or neglect includes modern slavery.<sup>iv</sup>

The Care Act 2014 sets out local responsibilities and roles for assessing and supporting adults in need of care and support. It outlines that councils should carry out a 'needs assessment' where it appears that an adult may have care and support needs. Key to this assessment is meeting eligibility criteria around how 'a physical or mental impairment or illness' impacts on being able to achieve certain specified outcomes such as getting dressed or preparing food and whether this then has a significant impact on wellbeing. Many victims of modern slavery will therefore not meet the thresholds to access Care Act support in local areas, meaning that they are not entitled to support from adult social care services. Councils want to be able to support vulnerable adults in their areas but, similarly to children's services, adult social care services across councils are facing a £3.5 billion funding gap by 2025 and difficult decisions are having to be made.<sup>v</sup>

### *Availability of suitable affordable housing*

Victims may also come into contact with housing or homelessness services, either before entering or when leaving the NRM when they could be vulnerable to homelessness and rough sleeping. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 contained a number of new provisions around support for those threatened with homelessness, in order to prevent homelessness from occurring. Key to this is the new duty on councils to provide advice and information to any person in their local area who is threatened with homelessness. This should include information and advice on:

- preventing homelessness;
- securing accommodation when homeless; and
- outlining the help that is available from the council or others and how to access that help.

Councils are then expected to agree a homelessness plan, carrying out an assessment where an eligible applicant is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless regardless of priority need. It also extends the period during which someone might qualify as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days. Earlier this year the Government also announced a number of additional resources to help prevent rough sleeping.<sup>vi</sup>

The availability of affordable housing is a real concern to councils. This includes the limited availability of social housing for potentially vulnerable groups, including victims of modern slavery.

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- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/national-referral-mechanism-statistics>
- <sup>iv</sup> <http://guidance.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/reader/practice-guidance-adults/victims-of-trafficking-and-modern-slavery/#121-safeguarding-duty>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-rough-sleeping-initiative-funding>