



South Tyneside Council

Item 6a

# Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-2028

This document has been classified as: **Not  
protectively marked**

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Council – 30 July 2026

## **Report to Council**

**Cabinet Portfolio/Lead Member: Cllr Susan Sybenga, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources**

**Report of Stuart Reid, Director of Business and Resources**

**Subject: Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-2028**

**Date: 30 July 2026**

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**Wards affected:** All

**Council ambitions:** All

**Does the report and any appendices contain information which has been identified as confidential or exempt?**

- No, this report does not contain information identified as confidential or exempt.

**For Executive Decisions only:**

Is the decision a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan? Yes

If not in the Forward Plan is the report: N/A

**Relevant Scrutiny Chair:** N/A

**Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?** No

(If the decision is anything other than any executive decision made by the Cabinet or a Key Decision made by an officer under delegated powers, call-in is not applicable. This should be explained in the report).

# **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement for an updated South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy that sets out the organisation's commitment to tackling modern slavery and presents a plan of actions for the coming years to help to tackle and deter modern slavery.

# **Background Information**

2. A range of different teams and services within South Tyneside Council, ranging from Children and Adult's Social Care to Public Protection, Procurement and Human Resources, have a role in protecting victims of modern slavery, supporting partners in responding to potential Modern Slavery, and ensuring internal processes minimise risks of enabling Modern Slavery.
3. The Council first developed a Modern Slavery Strategy in 2019 in order to ensure coordination of this anti-slavery work and identify opportunities to further collaborate and strengthen work in this important area.
4. A further Modern Slavery Strategy was published in 2022, renewing priorities and identifying further opportunities for action within the context at the time including the post-Covid context and greater numbers of local people facing financial hardship with the cost-of-living crisis.
5. In the time since the 2022 strategy was published, work in this area has progressed significantly, with many of the actions completed. The refreshed 2026-2028 Strategy provides an opportunity to adjust approaches to respond to new and emerging Modern Slavery challenges and opportunities, including changing regional partnerships and emerging risks in sectors such as the care sector.

# **Main issues and Options to be Considered**

6. The refreshed 2026-28 Modern Slavery Strategy describes the challenge of modern slavery, sets out the legislative and policy context and outlines South Tyneside Council's intended approach to leveraging different local authority functions to contribute to playing a role in protecting residents and the organisation from the threats of modern slavery.
7. The 2026-28 Strategy builds upon the structure of the previous strategy, setting out actions linked to various broad themes in relation to combating slavery:
  - IDENTIFY - equipping Council employees to recognise and report signs of modern-day slavery.

- RESPOND – ensuring key Council services, from housing to social care, are positioned to respond confidently and effectively where slavery or potential slavery is identified locally.
  - PREVENT – strengthening internal processes for identification and reduction of risks of modern slavery in the business and supply chain.
  - DISRUPT - ensuring relevant Council services, from Trading Standards to Environmental Health, are able to confidently support police with investigation and disruption activities.
  - ENGAGE - leveraging Council influencing and communications functions to raise awareness of modern slavery in the community.
  - COORDINATE – ensuring that cross-service activity relating to modern slavery is coordinated, complementary and connected.
8. These themes are in line with those identified in previous iterations of the South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy, although the new 'Coordinate' theme has been added for the 2026-28 Modern Slavery Strategy following feedback from services involved in the Modern Slavery Coordination Group.
  9. For each objective area, the strategy outlines work to date and gives an overview of considerations and priorities in relation to next steps, before committing to take forward a number of specific actions over the next two years.
  10. There are a range of different specific actions across the six themes that are outlined in the Strategy. These include a number of actions relating to ongoing and still necessary work, including continued use of social media to amplify national awareness raising campaigns and continued efforts to ensure council staff are trained and confident in recognising and reporting the signs of modern slavery. Other actions identify newer activities linked to emerging challenges or opportunities, for example, awareness raising work with local care sector networks, staff and employers in response to rising national modern slavery cases associated with this sector.
  11. Key action areas within the strategy have been identified by representatives from different services across the Modern Slavery Coordination Group. Membership of this group includes senior officers from across services with different functions around responding to modern slavery, including those working in housing, procurement, children's social care, adult social care, community safety, environmental protection, and public health. The draft Strategy has additionally been discussed with and endorsed by a range of partners, including via the Community Safety Partnership.
  12. Individual actions set out within the Modern Slavery Strategy will be progressed by the relevant service, although the delivery of the Strategy will be overseen by the Modern Slavery Coordination Group, which meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Director of Business and Resources.

# Implications

## Financial and Resources

13. There are minimal financial or resource implications associated with the refreshed Modern Slavery Strategy. All activities identified within the strategy are expected to be met within the existing resources of the services leading each action.

## Legal and Governance

14. There is no legal requirement for local authorities to publish a Modern Slavery Strategy, although councils are under a general legal duty to do all they can to reasonably prevent crime and disorder in their areas, including modern slavery. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 also places a number of specific duties on the Council, including s52 which requires local authorities to identify and refer modern slavery child victims and consenting adult victims through the National Referral Process, and s54 which requires all organisations with a turnover of over £36 million including local authorities to produce an annual transparency statement outlining activity undertaken to minimise the risk of modern slavery in the business and supply chain.
15. This Modern Slavery Strategy enables the Council to take action around these duties, including with the actions associated with the 'Identify' and 'Respond' objective, which relate to identifying and support victims, as well as with the 'Prevent' objective, which supports the ongoing strengthening of supply chains and business practices and enables the delivery of an annual transparency statement.
16. With regards to governance, the refreshed Modern Slavery Strategy sets out plans to strengthen links between the existing Modern Slavery Coordination Group and a number of key forums and boards, including the Community Safety Partnership and the Strategic Exploitation Partnership, and additionally seeks to explore opportunities to better involved elected members in scrutiny of modern slavery-related activities.

## Risk

17. Inadvertently contributing to or failing to protect service users or supply lines from modern slavery would represent a significant risk for the Council. The refreshed Modern Slavery Strategy identifies opportunities to proactively reduce the risks to both the business and to the community.

## Equality and Diversity and Community

18. Modern Slavery can affect people of all genders, nationalities, ages and backgrounds, however victims of particular forms of modern slavery are often associated with particular characteristics, such as age or gender, and certain

circumstances, such as learning disabilities or language barriers, are also known to make people particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

19. The Modern Slavery Strategy has been developed with close consideration for the latest regional and national intelligence around the profiles of modern slavery victims associated with different types of modern slavery, including protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age and disability.
20. An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed and appended to this report.

## **Environmental and Sustainability**

21. There are no significant environmental and sustainability impacts associated with this report, although efforts in relation to supply chain risk assessment closely align with wider Council sustainability priorities.

## **Council Ambitions, Policies, Strategies and Plans**

22. The Modern Slavery Strategy is a cross-service strategy which contributes to all of the Council's corporate ambitions. In particular, this includes contributing to the ambition of ensuring residents are 'Part of Strong Communities', in so far as the Strategy seeks to leverage services, communities and partners in efforts to recognise and combat slavery, and to the 'Targeting Support to Make Things Fairer' ambition, insofar as it identifies and seeks to provides support around particular groups and service-users who are particularly vulnerable to slavery.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

23. The Modern Slavery Strategy was developed in consultation with the Modern Slavery Coordination Group, including representatives of Public Protection, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Procurement, People and Organisational Development, Performance and Change Management, and more.
24. The draft Strategy was reviewed by the Community Safety Partnership in January 2026, with feedback taken into account.

## **Recommendations**

25. It is recommended that the Council approve and adopt the updated South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-2028.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

26. The Strategy helps to coordinate cross-service action around Modern Slavery and drive forward improvements and initiatives which help to protect the organisation and the local and wider community from the risks of Modern Slavery.

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment  
Appendix 2 – Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-28

# Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-2028

The following is a list of the background papers (excluding exempt papers) relied upon in the preparation of the above report:

| Background Paper                                 | File Ref: | File Location                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Modern Slavery Act 2015                          | N/A       | <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents</a> |
| South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy 2022-2024 |           | <a href="#">Modern Slavery Strategy 2022-2024</a>                                                                         |

## **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)**

All public authorities are required to, in carrying out their functions, show due regard for the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity between people who shared a protected characteristic and those who don't; and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not (Equalities Act 2010).

Services are responsible for ensuring that EqIAs are completed to help inform decision making on all relevant Key Decisions, new or revised policies and any substantial proposed changes to services.

This process helps decision makers to assess, and evidence that they have assessed, the potential implications of a proposed policy or service change on service users with protected characteristics. It supports reflection on implications for different groups and prompts the identification of any mitigation activities that may need to be taken to minimise potential inequalities that could result from the proposal.

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Directorate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Governance & Corporate Affairs   | Service            | Performance & Change Management |
| Responsible Officer (Title)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Senior Strategy & Policy Officer | Date of Assessment | 21/04/2026                      |
| <b>Brief description of the proposed new or altered policy or service?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                  |                    |                                 |
| Proposed 2026-2028 refresh of the South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy, which serves to coordinate and focus cross-service efforts to prevent and respond to modern slavery.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                  |                    |                                 |
| <b>Who are the main customer or employee groups affected by this new or altered policy or service?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                  |                    |                                 |
| Victims or potential victims of modern slavery, living in South Tyneside and beyond.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                  |                    |                                 |
| <b>What evidence and engagement has been considered to inform this assessment?</b> <i>(Please reference and summarise data sources or engagement exercises and their findings)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                  |                    |                                 |
| Latest (2025/26) government National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics - <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2025">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2025/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2025</a> – which give an insight |                                  |                    |                                 |

into the number and profile of modern slavery victims referred and identified within the UK over the last year.

Latest (2024/25) Unseen UK Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline Annual Assessment - [https://www.unseenuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Unseen-Helpline-Annual-Assessment\\_2024.pdf](https://www.unseenuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Unseen-Helpline-Annual-Assessment_2024.pdf) – which gives insights into exploitation types and associated victim profiles for modern slavery incidents which may not have been formally reported.

Northumbria Police, internal service and other partner insights, shared within local meetings, which help to provide local intelligence on modern slavery patterns and risk areas.

A range of other evidence is also considered when informed activities, including research by the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab (one of the worlds largest groups of modern slavery researchers).

**Identification and description of impact.** Please identify where there is a positive, neutral or negative impact. Then describe in more detail the nature of any identified potential disproportionate negative impact, including any potential barriers to access, existing or anticipated unequal outcomes or experiences, and effect on intra-group relations and community cohesion:

**The Nine Protected Characteristics (as identified by the Equalities Act 2010)**

|            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age        | Positive | Modern slavery affects age groups in different ways. Adults are more commonly affected by labour exploitation, which made up 38% of all National Referral Mechanisms in 2025. Children are disproportionately affected by sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation such as county lines activity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Disability | Positive | People with disabilities (particularly learning disabilities, cognitive impairment and special educational needs) are known to be particularly vulnerable to modern slavery. Although disability status is not collected in National Referral Mechanism statistics, government analysis of the lived experience of disabled people in the UK indicates that disabled people are more likely to experience exploitation and abuse, particularly where they face barriers to independent living, employment, communication or access to justice. Research by the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab found evidence that people with learning disabilities and cognitive impairments are at increased risk of exploitation, particularly where perpetrators exploit trust, dependency, and difficulties with understanding risk or asserting consent. The Human Trafficking Foundation's Snowdrop Project report also identifies that learning disabilities and neurodivergence are linked to sexual, criminal, and labour exploitation and domestic servitude, pointing to well-documented UK cases where victims with |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                    |                     | learning disability have been coerced into unpaid work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Sex                                                                | Positive            | Female victims make up 53% of total victims identified through the Unseen Modern Slavery Helpline and are particularly prevalent in modern slavery cases involving sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and domestic servitude. Male victims make up 47% of victims identified through the Unseen Modern Slavery Helpline overall.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sexual Orientation                                                 | Positive            | Although sexual orientation is not collected in National Referral Mechanism statistics, there is evidence that LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately represented among cohorts of people experiencing circumstances which may increase vulnerability to exploitation and modern slavery, such as homelessness, socio-economic marginalisation or poor mental health.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Gender Reassignment                                                | Positive            | Although gender is not collected in National Referral Mechanism statistics, there is evidence that LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately represented among cohorts of people experiencing circumstances which may increase vulnerability to exploitation and modern slavery, such as homelessness, socio-economic marginalisation or poor mental health.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Marriage or Civil Partnership (in employment only)                 | Neutral / No Impact | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Pregnancy and Maternity                                            | Positive            | 2024 research by the University of Nottingham Rights Lab, Causeway and the NIHR indicates that pregnancy and maternity can significantly increase vulnerability to modern slavery, with 29% modern slavery survivors reporting being pregnant while being trafficked or exploited, often in contexts of sexual exploitation, with pregnancy restricting movement and contributing to dependency on perpetrators.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Race (including colour, ethnicity, nationality or national origin) | Positive            | Ethnicity, nationality and language are strongly associated with modern slavery risk. National Referral Mechanism data shows that in 2025, while 22% of potential victims were British nationals, 78% were non-UK nationals, with people from Eritrea, Vietnam, and Somalia among the most commonly referred nationalities, reflecting heightened vulnerability linked to migration routes, insecure status, and language barriers. Different types of slavery are often associated with different ethnicity profiles, with UK nationals making up the majority of criminal |

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                  |          | exploitation referrals, particularly for children and young people, while non-UK nationals are more heavily over-represented in labour exploitation (with Eritrean, Vietnamese and Albanian nationals particularly represented) and sexual exploitation (particularly women from Vietnam, Romania, and other Eastern European, African and Asian countries).                                                                                                                                          |
| Religion or belief                                                                                               | Positive | While religion is not a risk factor in itself, research by the University of Nottingham Rights Lab (Faith Responses to Modern Slavery) suggests that exploitation is more prevalent in closed, highly controlled, belief-based settings.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Other Groups</b>                                                                                              |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Care Leavers                                                                                                     | Positive | Care-experienced children and care leavers are over-represented among victims of exploitation, particularly criminal exploitation. Research by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) and submissions to Parliament highlight that young adults with care experience, trauma and adverse childhood experiences are at heightened risk of exploitation into early adulthood, with inadequate support during the transition from care increasing vulnerability to exploitation and re-exploitation. |
| Armed Forces Veterans                                                                                            | Positive | Veteran status is not captured in official modern slavery statistics, but UK research shows that a minority of armed forces veterans can face heightened vulnerability following transition to civilian life, particularly where mental ill-health, homeless, debt or insecure work are present, with these factors associated with increased risks of exploitation.                                                                                                                                  |
| Those at risk of socio-economic disadvantage                                                                     | Positive | The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner identifies poverty, homelessness, debt and insecure work as core drivers of modern slavery, with research by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) indicating that a substantial proportion of victims were homeless or economic insecure at the point of exploitation.                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Please indicate what actions you intend to take to mitigate negative impact, where it has been identified</b> |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                  |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

The Modern Slavery Strategy and the actions (ranging from training to targeted community engagement campaigns) within have been developed with consideration for the characteristic profiles associated with both modern slavery overall and with different forms of modern slavery.

The latest insights and intelligence are shared and discussed by the South Tyneside Modern Slavery Group and are also considered by partnership groups such as the North East Anti-Slavery Network, with these insights used to shape and inform activity.

**Are there any negative impacts that cannot reasonably be avoided? If so, on balance, please describe your rationale for why it is still appropriate to proceed with the proposal.**

N/A

**How do you plan to monitor ongoing impact and the effectiveness of any identified mitigation activities?**

The Modern Slavery Strategy is refreshed every few years, with consideration given to changes in the latest intelligence and to the local context. Salient intelligence updates are also shared with the Modern Slavery Coordination Group, which meets on a quarterly basis, meaning that activities can be stepped up or targeted as required in response to new information.

|                                           |                |                                       |  |                             |  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Responsible Officer Title & Sign-Off Date | Ash Crane-Bell | Head of Service Title & Sign-Off Date |  | Lead Member & Sign-Off Date |  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|