



South Tyneside Council

Item 6b

Modern Slavery Strategy 2026-28

South Tyneside Council

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What is Modern Slavery?

Modern slavery is a heinous crime involving the severe violation of human rights. It is defined by Anti-Slavery International, as “**when an individual is exploited by others, for personal or commercial gain. Whether tricked, coerced, or forced, they lose their freedom.**”

The Equality & Human Rights Commission describes it as “**when someone actually owns you, like a piece of property**”.

Slavery can take many different forms (often interrelated and overlapping), including:

- **Forced Labour** – Work or service extracted from someone under threat or penalty (to them or their families), typically involving long work hours, poor working and living conditions, and little to low pay. It can involve various sectors, including construction, manufacturing, hospitality, agriculture, and more. (It's important to note that there is a distinction between forced labour and labour exploitation, in that victims of forced labour lack freedom and are unable to leave their job or reach out for help, whereas workers who are underpaid or working in poor conditions still have freedom and are able to leave their job, even if this causes them financial difficulty).
- **Domestic Servitude** – Where a victim is forced to work in private households usually performing domestic chores and childcare duties, typically with restricted freedom, long hours for little or no pay, poor working and living conditions.
- **Debt Bondage** – A form of forced labour or other slavery which happens when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt, which is typically impossible or very difficult to pay off.
- **Sexual Exploitation** – Sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, forced prostitution and the abuse of children or the production of child abuse images or videos.
- **Criminal Exploitation** – Where somebody is forced to engage in criminal activities, such as carrying or cultivating drugs, theft or fraud.
- **Human Trafficking** - the recruitment, transportation, transfer harbouring or receipt of a person, through force coercion, or deception, with the purpose of exploitation.
- **Other forms of exploitation** - such as organ removal, forced begging, forced marriage and illegal adoption.

Slavery typically involves an element of implied or actual violence or other penalty, directed either toward the person or to their loved ones, which contributes towards the restricted freedom of the victim and their inability to escape the situation.

Other methods used to control the victim include, though are not limited to, intentionally keeping the person in a situation of social or physical isolation, plying the person with alcohol or drugs, withholding basic necessities such as food or sanitation, withholding passports or other important personal or immigration documents, controlling access to bank accounts, or charging unreasonable fees (for example, recruitment or training fees or food and board fees which leave the person in a situation of debt bondage).

A person may or may not be aware that they are being exploited or are in a situation of slavery. Sometimes, a person may not understand or may have been actively misled about their rights (including employment or immigration rights). Other times, a victim may perceive their situation to be an improvement on a previous or alternative situation, or they may have been groomed and may trust or have an emotional connection to their perpetrator.

Modern slavery is closely linked to and can be seen to fall into the wider umbrella of **'exploitation'**, which can be broadly defined as **'when a person is groomed, forced or coerced into doing something that they don't want to do for somebody else's benefit'**. However, modern day slavery is also distinct from other forms of exploitation in that, unlike exploitation, in which the victim still has some degree of autonomy, slavery involves loss of freedom for the victim and ownership-like control by the perpetrator. Situations which are exploitative but would not necessarily be legally considered modern slavery include labour exploitation (work without fair pay or reasonable working conditions) or other situations where the victim is groomed, deceived or coerced to engage in sexual or criminal activity or to otherwise provide a service or give a financial benefit but where they are not held in ownership-like control.

International, National, Regional and Local Picture

One of the major challenges in tackling modern slavery is that it is often hidden in plain sight. People from all different ages, genders, and nationalities can be victims, and it can take place in ordinary-seeming homes and in businesses across all different sectors. Even understanding the scale and profile of the problem can be difficult.



Global Picture

Globally, according to global human rights group Walk Free (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, 2021), it is estimated that around the world there are 49.6 million people living in modern slavery, including experiencing forced labour or forced marriage, with children making up roughly a quarter of all victims of modern slavery.

National Picture

Nationally, the true extent of modern slavery is unknown, but the latest Global Slavery Index (2023) estimates that there are 122,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK and the latest available annual Home Office data shows that there were 19,125 potential victims of human trafficking and modern slavery identified through the National Referral Mechanism in 2024.

Across the country, nearly a quarter of National Referral Mechanism referrals in 2024 were for UK nationals.

Other notable nationalities represented including Albanian (23% of referrals) and Vietnamese (11% of referrals), with Eritrean, Sudanese, Indian, Iranian, Somali, Afghan and Syrian people also represented in high numbers.

NRM data also shows that particular types of slavery are more likely to affect particular victims – for example, women and eastern European women in particular are especially likely to be victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, whereas men are especially likely to be exploited for their labour, and children (particularly British children) are often involved in criminal exploitation.

We know that, nationally and locally, particular circumstances can make people more vulnerable to exploitation, including labour exploitation and modern slavery. Risks of exploitation for those with a lack of knowledge or understanding of the law or of their rights, or those lacking an established network of people they can look to for support – for example, people who have recently migrated to the local area, or individuals who are socially isolated and face barriers such as language barriers or learning disabilities.

Some business types are especially vulnerable to modern slavery, particularly those with high volumes of low-skilled, transient workers, and those where labour costs are a significant portion of overall expenses. Industries like agriculture, food processing, construction, care work and hospitality are frequently identified as high risk, with car washes, nail bars and sex work specifically vulnerable to exploitation. In recent years, the care sector has also been identified as a sector where there is a high risk of labour exploitation.

Regional & Local Picture

The National Crime Industry has stated that Modern Slavery and trafficking occurs ‘in every UK town and city’ and, like other places, South Tyneside has had a small but not insignificant number of cases in recent years.

Intelligence tells us that in the North East, slavery doesn’t have the same profile as in some other areas of the country, where it may be particularly linked to certain sectors or strongly linked to organised crime gangs. Instead, in the North East, numbers appear to be lower, but slavery takes many different forms and is often perpetrated by individuals or more loosely-organised networks. This can make it particularly challenging to recognise and disrupt.

Cases that have taken place in the North East in the recent years have involved a range of sectors, victim profiles and exploitation methods, including but not limited to organised gangs who have trafficked individuals from abroad and forced them into sex work and forced ‘agency’ work, criminals who have manipulated local young people into becoming involved in criminal activity, and individual business owners who have exploited vulnerable people into working for no or low pay.

Legislative and Policy Context

Local authorities have a number of statutory duties in relation to Modern Slavery. In the UK, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 is the main legislation covering Modern Slavery.

The Act sets out **offences of slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, and human trafficking**, with clear **penalties** for perpetrators.

It also sets out **requirements around transparency in supply chains** aimed at preventing UK businesses from contributing to or benefiting from Modern Slavery in the UK or abroad, with businesses and other organisations (including local authorities) above a certain size being required to publish annual statements detailing their efforts to keep their supply chains slavery-free. (Note, a further **Modern Slavery (Amendment) Bill** was introduced in parliament in 2021 with the intention of strengthening transparency requirements by establishing minimum standards and creating new offences for false or incomplete statements. However, despite being referenced in the Queen's Speech 2022, this bill has not been passed.) Additionally, the recent **Procurement Act 2023** further strengthens protections against modern slavery by introducing mandatory exclusion from public procurement for bidders convicted of modern slavery offences within the last five years, and by making evidence of modern slavery grounds for discretionary exclusion.

Government guidance attached to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 also provides detailed instruction for professionals, including social workers and others, on how to identify potential victims and offer support, with the latest National Procurement Policy Statement (which came into force in early 2025) also requiring contracting authorities to ensure their suppliers are actively working to tackle modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

As part of this, the **National Referral Mechanism** framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery was set out, and introducing a Duty to Notify upon 'first responders' in public authorities (including social workers, police officers, health professionals and others) where they have reasonable grounds to believe a person may be a victim of Modern Slavery. After the referral, the Home Office will investigate whether the case is likely modern slavery, and depending on the outcome of that decision, the individual in question will or won't become eligible for a range of wider recovery support, such as safehouse accommodation, outreach support, and legal aid, provided by the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract, which is primarily delivered by The Salvation Army.

While the Modern Slavery Act 2015 remains the main legislation guiding local authorities and others in addressing Modern Slavery, other established and newer legislation also both impact the working of the Modern Slavery Act and place related duties on local authorities to protect and support children and adults (particularly those with care and support needs) at risk of exploitation.

In particular, the **Housing Act 1996**, the **Children's Act 1989**, and the **Care Act 2014** all place particular duties on local authorities around accommodating and supporting vulnerable people.

The **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** also places a duty upon councils to exercise their functions in a way that helps with the prevention of crime and disorder in their local area, which includes modern slavery and trafficking, and other related crimes including offences associated with county lines (the organised transportation and dealing of illegal drugs, often by engaging young people and vulnerable adults) and child sexual exploitation.

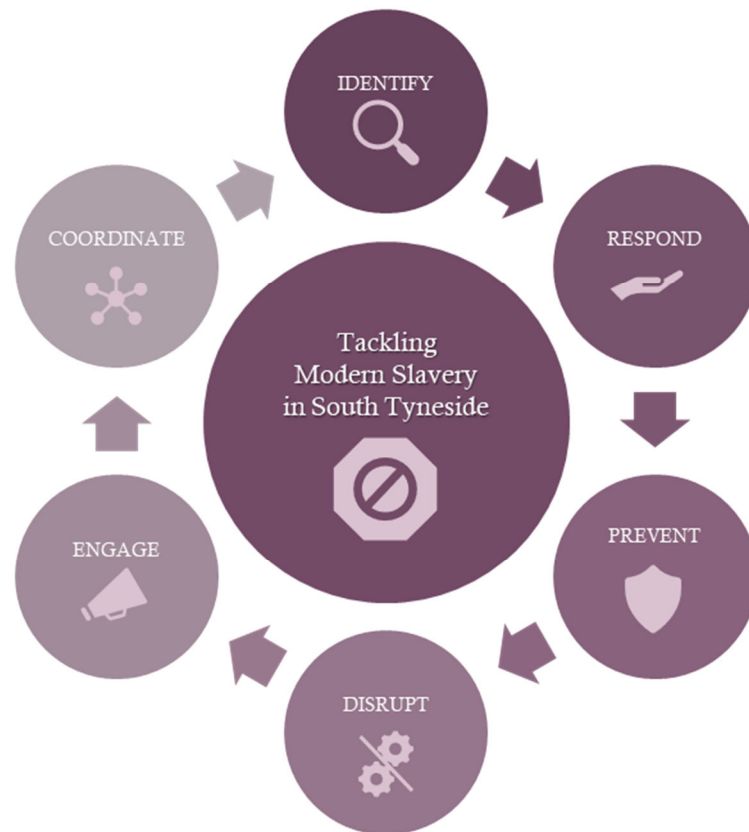
Local government bodies, like national governments, are legally required to comply with various international conventions, including specific articles of the **Palermo Protocol, European Convention of Human Rights, and EU Anti-Trafficking Directive** which obligate authorities to identify, investigate and provide appropriate support to victims of slavery, trafficking and torture.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has published a comprehensive **Council Guide to Tackling Modern Slavery**, last updated in 2022, including detailed information on Council's legal obligations in relation to Modern Slavery, and practical advice for officers working in areas including Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Housing, and Community Safety.

Our Approach To Tackling Modern Slavery

In South Tyneside, we have chosen to pursue a multi-pronged approach to tackling modern slavery, recognising that there are range of different priorities for the different services with a role to play in this important area of work.

Our approach sets out six key interrelated themes around which we have focused our activities: Identify; Respond; Disrupt; Prevent; Engage and a new emphasis on Coordinate. Specific actions tied to each of these themes are set out in the following pages.



This latest iteration of the South Tyneside Modern Slavery Strategy builds on the work undertaken over recent years in line with previous strategies using the same framework and is overseen by our Modern Slavery Coordination Group, which is chaired by the Director of Business and Resources and coordinated by the Senior Strategy and Policy Officer. It involves representatives from services including: Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Commissioning, Public Health, Housing

Strategy and Regulation, Operational Housing and Homelessness, Public Protection, Community Safety, Performance and Change Management, Policy and Insight, People and Organisational Change, Communications, and Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

The Modern Slavery Coordination Group is also closely linked with and has some overlapping membership with the South Tyneside Community Safety Partnership (made up of representatives including the Council, Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, National Probation Service, South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group, South Tyneside Foundation Trust, South Tyneside College and the Northumbria Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner). It also links with the South Tyneside Strategic Exploitation Group (which is led by the Independent Chair of the South Tyneside Safeguarding Adults Board, Chair of the South Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Partnership, and Independent Scrutineer for the Safeguarding Children's Partnership. This involves representatives from the Council's Adult Social Care and Children's and Families Social Care services alongside partners including Northumbria Police, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, the National Probation Service, and Healthwatch.

Although the Strategy is focused on the internal work of services within South Tyneside Council, much of this work is also undertaken alongside and informed by the work key partners, particularly Northumbria Police, but also, at a national level, the Salvation Army, the Home Office, the National Crime Agency, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, and at a regional and local level, the Police and Crime Commissioners, local health partners, local housing partners, and neighbouring local authorities, among many others

IDENTIFY

What does this involve?

Frontline Council workers working with vulnerable populations or visiting private housing and premises are well placed to recognise signs that a person may be being exploited.

As such the Council has a clear opportunity to help identify potential victims by ensuring staff across these functions are knowledgeable about what to look for and how to report concerns.

Actions to date

We have:

- Offered **training for Council staff** to help them recognise the signs of modern slavery and understand how to raise concerns, including an **all-staff e-learning course** and more in-depth training delivered through the Children and Adults' Safeguarding Team.
- Used internal communications channels including '**All Staff**' newsletters and the **staff Intranet** to raise awareness and widely share basic information and resources on modern slavery
- **Produced information leaflets that have been distributed to and discussed with non-desk based frontline staff**, aimed at building awareness of the signs of modern slavery and how to report concerns
- Delivered **awareness sessions with Elected Members** to help them understand their role in recognising Modern Slavery and raising concerns
- Collaborated with the Council's Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) Employee Networks to **raise awareness of how modern slavery can affect different groups of people**, including through dedicated sessions and through sharing awareness-raising materials and EDIB Network celebration events

Next steps

We will work to:

- Continue to use all available **internal communications channels and internal events** to raise awareness and engage staff from all parts of the organisation in recognising and addressing modern slavery
- Further **strengthen the e-learning and training offer**, including exploring ways to improve tracking of which officers have and haven't completed training
- **Map out which teams within the organisation would benefit from more in-depth or specialised service-specific Modern Slavery training** (including, for example, on the National Referral Mechanism or supply chain risk assessments) and agree a plan for engaging with and producing resources for these cohorts
- Explore options for **increasing Elected Member engagement**, including building training into Member Development programmes and exploring ways to share information at CAFs and other well-attended forums beyond All-Member's Communications
- Collaborate with partners to **develop and share case studies** where modern slavery incidents are identified (particularly locally and regionally) to help raise awareness for others of the kinds of circumstances where signs of modern slavery may have been overlooked or successfully recognised and addressed

RESPOND

What does this involve?

As a provider of key social and health services (including Adult and Children's Social Care, Public Health, Public Protection and Housing), the Council has a number of duties and roles in relation to responding to concerns around and supporting both adult and child victims or potential victims of exploitation and modern slavery.

In particular, a number of Council services have key roles in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the framework for multi-agency professionals supporting information-sharing around and an effective response to children and young people who may be at risk of exploitation, and the PREM (Partnership Reduction of Missing and Exploitation), a police-led multi-agency outcome-focused forum model aimed at reducing exploitation risks and vulnerabilities associated with missing episodes. Similarly, different Council services have a role in contributing to multi-agency decision-making around the safeguarding of adults with care needs, facilitated through the Safeguarding Adults Board. Key mechanisms include Complex Adult Risk Management (CARM) meetings, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and other information- and intelligence-sharing meetings.

Where incidents of modern slavery are identified within South Tyneside, a range of different services may also be called upon to provide immediate services and support, with expectations around this set out in the multi-agency Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation response plan.

Actions to date

We have:

- **Developed and updated a multi-agency Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation response plan**
- Contributed to **strengthened regional multi-agency safeguarding, assessment and intelligence-sharing arrangements** with implementation involving new monthly operational 'PREM' meetings and quarterly Strategic Exploitation Groups
- Delivered a rolling **programme of Multi Agency Safeguarding Training** on modern slavery and other related topics to Council and partner professionals
- Appointed a **complex abuse senior practitioner** within social care and equipped 'champions' within key service areas, including social workers and early help teams, with knowledge and understanding about exploitation including modern slavery

Next steps

We will work to:

- **Refresh the Multi-Agency Slavery Response Plan**, including with refresher simulation training
- **Continue to promote the Safeguarding-led Modern Slavery Training Programme** and explore opportunities to monitor engagement to better understand which services and partners are well-engaged or need additional support
- Explore opportunities for improved wraparound support of victims of modern slavery and exploitation, including by exploring options for how to ensure a more **trauma-informed response** across all services
- **Improve transition to adulthood planning** between Children's and Adults Services colleagues to ensure young people aging out of Children's Services who are at risk of exploitation but do not meet the criteria for adult care and support needs are still able to be referred to the Complex Adults Risk Management framework, to ensure that their circumstances are reviewed.
- Continue work with the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner's Violence Reduction Unit around the **Safe Return model and coordination of targeted multi-agency support** for children and young people who have had missing episodes and may be at risk of exploitation.

PREVENT

What does this involve?

As an organisation responsible for managing sizable amounts of public funds, employing workers and procuring and commissioning a range of goods and services, it is critical important that South Tyneside Council is confident it has the right checks and balances to ensure it doesn't inadvertently contribute to slavery in its business or supply chains.

Actions to date

We have:

- Ensured **Modern Slavery Act compliance is a routine part of all Council procurement due diligence**, including by requiring suppliers to confirm annual modern slavery reporting requirements and declare any trafficking offences as part of the **Supplier Selection Questionnaire**
- **Produced annual Modern Slavery Transparency Statements** to ensure compliance with Modern Slavery Act transparency in supply chain requirements
- Developed a **Procurement Strategy** which placed a particular focus upon Modern Slavery prevention
- Worked with regional partners through the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) to implement a **regional Modern Slavery Pledge** and develop a **regional Environment, Social and Governance strategy** which includes modern slavery prevention considerations
- Taken action to **better assess risks of modern slavery in the local care system**, including by surveying local care homes
- Reviewed and strengthened internal policies including our **Whistleblowing Policy** and use of employment agencies to ensure they are fit for purpose in avoiding and managing risks of slavery within our operations

Next steps

We will work to:

- Explore options for implementing **additional procurement checks on suppliers in higher-risk sectors** and for otherwise **strengthening the supplier assessment process**

- **Refresh the Council's Procurement Strategy for 2026-29, ensuring a focus on Modern Slavery risk mitigation**
- Develop **dedicated Contracts Committee training** to raise committee member awareness of the importance of keeping supply chains free of Modern Slavery
- Continue to **raise awareness of potential risks in the care sector**, including by developing awareness information and **advice specifically targeted at local home care providers**

DISRUPT

What does this involve?

Local authorities have special functions and powers with regards to upholding trading standards, regulating and licensing certain activities and inspecting premises for health and safety (such as hospitality and agriculture premises). It is important that the officers involved in these services in South Tyneside have a good awareness of how they can use these functions to support police operations, including into potential modern slavery and trafficking cases.

Actions to date

We have:

- **Provided training to Council officers with special regulatory and inspection powers** (ranging from planning to trading standards to environmental health), ensuring they have an understanding of how to contribute to police investigation and disruption operations
- Worked with regional and multi-agency partners to establish forums to better share intelligence, including **supporting the establishment of a new Anti-Slavery Network** for the region, and the establishment of a new South Tyneside-area Community Tension Monitoring Group
- Promoted **awareness-raising with licensed sectors** (taxis, nightlife etc), including making training a requirement for licensing
- **Mapped high-risk business types** across the borough (including car washes and nail salons)

Next steps

We will work to:

- **Develop a targeted modern slavery training offer for Regulatory services** with special powers of entry and ability to support police investigations (e.g. Environmental Health)
- Continue to embed **awareness-raising and training with licensed sectors** (taxis, nightlife etc)
- **Further explore opportunities to engage more closely with high-risk business types** across the borough (e.g. car washes, nail salons)

- **Lobby for greater powers** for local authorities and partners to enter suspicious premises

ENGAGE

What does this involve?

The Council has a key role in convening and influencing the wider South Tyneside community, including partners, businesses and residents. It therefore has a range of opportunities to mobilise stakeholders to join in with tackling slavery, including by using external communications channels and community networks to share information and raise awareness about modern slavery and exploitation.

Actions to date

We have:

- Used social media channels and other communications such as the Residents Newsletter to promote **modern slavery awareness campaigns**
- Shared **business advice around Modern Slavery mitigation** to organisations engaged with the South Tyneside Pledge
- Targeted **advice and information on how to recognise exploitation and Modern Slavery with community organisations** engaged with the Poverty Group and Welcoming Spaces
- Met with key partners in the local care system including Care Home Managers to share **advice on recognising Modern Slavery risks in the care sector**
- Promoted modern slavery advice phone lines and other key information on how to report concerns through the Council's **annual Modern Slavery Transparency Statement and associated press releases**

Next steps

We will work to:

- **Host an event with South Tyneside Pledge members** to improve the local business community's understanding of supply chain transparency and modern slavery risk mitigation opportunities
- **Develop sector-specific resources** for local organisations working in higher-risk sectors
- Develop **'Know Your Rights' resources** to be shared with services and community organisations working with vulnerable people
- Explore options for a **Housing Rights campaign** aimed at Private Sector Landlords and tenants

- **Engage with schools** via the Safer Schools Partnership to ensure teaching staff feel confident recognising and reporting modern slavery concerns
- Continue to use local channels **to promote national modern slavery awareness campaigns**

COORDINATE

What does this involve?

There are a wide range of Council services and functions with a role to play in tackling modern slavery in different ways, so it is important that information is shared appropriately across the organisation and that activity is coordinated and complementary. Especially because modern slavery is a hidden crime, it is also important that the Council has a good understanding of to what extent its efforts are effective in reducing risks and supporting victims.

Actions to date

We have:

- Established a **Modern Slavery Coordination Group** that meets on a quarterly basis, chaired by the Director for Business and Resources and involving representatives from Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Commissioning, Housing, Public Health, HR, Procurement, Public Protection and others.
- Used the annual Modern Slavery Strategy as an opportunity not just to comply with statutory transparency in supply chain statutory requirements but to **share information publicly on an annual basis on the Council's Modern Slavery activities across its various functions**
- Convened representatives from across Council services in a **Modern Slavery Workshop in late 2024** to review activity to date and inform this refreshed Modern Slavery Strategy
- **Promoted modern slavery advice phone lines** and other key information on how to report concerns through the Council's Annual transparency statement and associated press releases

Next steps

We will work to:

- Strengthen links between the Modern Slavery Steering Group and other forums, including by establishing a once-annual **update report to the Community Safety Partnership** and to the relevant **Scrutiny Committee**
- Improve regional partnership working, including through contributing to the **new North East Anti-Slavery Partnership**

- Explore ways to **strengthen our data** and understanding of local referrals and other slavery-related metrics
- Explore options to identify and provide training for a volunteer **Elected Member Modern Slavery Champion**
- Keep connected with national networks and learning, including the **LGA Modern Slavery Network**