

West Berkshire Council's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement

Introduction

Modern slavery is the illegal exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain. Modern slavery can take many forms, including:

- Human trafficking;
- Forced labour;
- Debt bondage/bonded labour;
- Descent-based slavery;
- Slavery of children; and
- Forced and early marriage.

West Berkshire Council (the Council) is committed to preventing modern slavery and human trafficking within all our corporate activities and supply chains. We uphold our statutory duty as described within the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to make a notification should we suspect an individual to be a possible victim of slavery or human trafficking.

This statement sets out the Council's actions and activities undertaken during the financial year 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023 to understand all potential modern slavery risks relating to our services (directly provided and commissioned) and to ensure no slavery or human trafficking takes place in our services or supply chains.

As part of Local Government, the Council recognises that we have a responsibility to take a robust approach to slavery and human trafficking and furthermore, acknowledge our requirement under Section 54 (Transparency in Supply Chains) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

1. Organisation structure and supply chains

This statement covers the activities of the Council. That includes direct employees of the Council, agency workers engaged through the Council's managed service and services delivered on behalf of the Council by third party organisations and in the Council's supply chains.

The Council operates within the United Kingdom. Whilst the risk of slavery and human trafficking is considered low, the Council remains vigilant and will take all steps available to manage the risks presented.



Where the Council requires external organisations to provide services on our behalf, contractors are required to sign Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) which require their compliance, and that of any sub-contractor, with all applicable statutory provisions. As part of this work, the Council updated its General T&Cs to include a new Modern Slavery clause.

The Council continues to undertake public procurement in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. In applicable tenders the Selection Questionnaire (SQ) includes a requirement to declare and evidence compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

2. Policies

The Council reviews its policies and procedures on an ongoing basis to ensure they remain compliant and fit for purpose.

The following internal policies and procedures are considered to be key in meeting the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act:

Employees code of conduct:

The Council's employees are expected to behave in accordance with the high standards of behaviour set out in the Officers' Code of Conduct. All employees are expected to apply the Council's Values to all aspects of their behaviour and conduct at work. All employees are expected to comply with the law relating to their work and general conduct. Any breaches of the Code of Conduct or other rules will be investigated and action taken as necessary

Recruitment:

The Council has a stringent Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure which sets out how recruitment is managed within the Council. Our processes are transparent and reviewed regularly.

All appointments will be subject to pre-employment checks. As a minimum these will include identity, the right to work in the UK, references from previous employers and medical fitness. Some jobs require additional checks; these may include Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), qualifications and professional registration. This process is supported by the Council's internal Pre-employment Checks Policy and Procedure.

Whistleblowing:

The Council is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. All employees, Elected Members, agency staff, volunteers and contractors working for the Council who are concerned about modern slavery in the Council can access the Council's Whistleblowing Procedure.

People who raise concerns, based on a reasonable belief, under the Whistleblowing Procedure will be protected from dismissal, victimisation or detriment because they have made a disclosure.

Council employees also have the ability to utilise the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and one of our recognised trade unions to also report any concerns.

The following external policy and procedures are considered to be key in meeting the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act:

Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policies and Procedures:

The Council's Adult Social Care services use this as their core safeguarding policy and includes any safeguarding responses to Modern Slavery identified within West Berkshire as per responsibilities set out under the Care Act.

3. Due diligence processes

The Council undertakes due diligence in all aspects of its work.

The Council's due diligence and reviews include:

- Reinforcing adherence to the Modern Slavery Act duties by working towards incorporating these into the relevant Council policies;
- Taking appropriate measures in the selection of suppliers and contractors through the use of a SQ as part of the procurement process and ensuring T&Cs around compliance are being met;
- Robustly undertaking a thorough recruitment and selection process for all employees;
- Scheduling monthly Exploitation, Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) meetings to support the identification of modern slavery and human trafficking and ensuring NRM referrals are made;
- Ensuring Council officers working in the front door service, Contact, Advice and Assessment Centre (CAAS), are aware of modern slavery and human trafficking to respond accordingly when such issues are identified or suspected;
- Continuing to be part of the National Transfer Scheme providing caring responsibilities for many young people and young adults who have experienced trafficking in their journey to the UK;
- Ensuring Care Quality Teams remain vigilant through contract monitoring and Care Quality processes;
- Providing training and awareness raising for staff and partner organisations to develop understanding of modern slavery and human trafficking; and
- Reporting quarterly on the number of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), number of MS1/Duty to Notify and number of intelligence reports submitted for our West Berkshire Local Police Area (LPA).

4. Risk assessment and management

The Council have had a modern slavery concern during the period of this statement relating to agency staff. This did not meet threshold for modern slavery, but it is therefore identified that the Council's care sector, specifically around agency workers (including those from overseas brought in on visas) is an area at risk of modern slavery.

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It is the responsibility of the neutral vendor to carry out regular audits of agency suppliers on behalf of the Council.

The Council have actively ensured any concerns raised with agencies have been subject to stringent safer recruitment checks by CQC and Care Quality teams.

The Council are working with hiring managers for temporary staff to remind them about their responsibilities to ensure that all bookings for workers are set up correctly and that they are viewing any compliance documents. Any concerns will be escalated accordingly to relevant staff.

The Council have added additional compliance requirements that agencies must complete which confirms the workers sponsor visa status when submitting their CV.

Appropriate measures have been proactively undertaken to mitigate the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking through close monitoring of services.

The Council identified good practice by its Commissioning, HR, Legal, Housing and Adult Safeguarding teams to identify and respond to modern slavery risks and/or concerns during this period, evidencing an effective response by Council employees.

5. Key performance indicators to measure effectiveness of steps being taken

The Council continues to receive reports on the number of referrals to the NRM, number of MS1/ Duty to Notify and number of lorry drops submitted for the West Berkshire LPA. This is shared with relevant departments internally to enhance local understanding and to raise awareness. These figures are reported as part of the Council's corporate KPIs.

The Council annually reviews the work that has been undertaken to address any modern slavery and human trafficking concerns. Any modern slavery concerns are addressed on a case by case basis ensuring there is a collaborative response to raise and address concerns whilst safeguarding individuals.

6. Training on modern slavery and human trafficking

All Council employees working within Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care undergo mandatory safeguarding training which includes awareness of Modern Slavery. The Council has an online e-learning module on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking available to all staff to provide a level of awareness in regards to Modern Slavery.

Awareness raising activities are arranged by the Building Communities Together (BCT) Team on behalf of the Council and offered to staff and partner agencies. The BCT Partnership fulfils the role of the Community Safety Partnership for West Berkshire.

Further steps

The Council is committed to working to ensure there is no slavery or human trafficking in our services or supply chains and will review this statement on an annual basis.

A modern slavery flowchart setting out the correct pathways will be developed to support and provide assistance for future concerns where modern slavery is raised to ensure staff feel confident to address and respond accordingly.

A strong multi-agency approach is required to tackle Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking and the Council remains in partnership with external partner agencies such as Thames Valley Police to ensure any modern slavery operations or concerns in West Berkshire are addressed. This involves working with other local authority areas for cross-border modern slavery concerns.

Approval for this statement

This statement was approved by the West Berkshire Council Chief Executive.

Name: Nigel Lynn

Signature:  _____

Date: 17th October