

17 December 2020

Draft Modern Slavery Strategy 2021/22

The Committee Clerk

Room 242, Parliament Buildings

Ballymiscaw

Stormont

Belfast

BT4 3XX

Re: Consultation Response to the Draft Modern Slavery Strategy 2021/22

To whom it may concern:

Mid Ulster District Council would like to take this opportunity to put forward its views and opinion on the draft Modern Slavery Strategy 2021/22.

It is important to note that this updated strategy is being developed as an outworking of The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. This piece of legislation has proved significant since its introduction and as such Council welcomes the development of this updated strategy for 2021/22.

It is particularly welcomed that an updated strategy will represent a multiagency collaborative approach. Mid Ulster District Council also welcomes the proposal for the development of a future longer term strategy which would include a comprehensive framework. This could provide opportunities for local authorities to play a more active role in relation to being able to identify and report possible case of modern slavery and strength the three strategic aims of; Pursue, Protect and Prevent. As such, Mid Ulster District Council would like to take this opportunity to express the ways in which local government could provide support to the achievement of the aims of the strategy.

Mid Ulster District Council notes and commends the following local government focused actions that were included in the 2019/20 Strategy. These actions included:

- Guidance for Local Councils to equip council personnel and their partners to identify, signpost and support victims of modern slavery (completed April 2020)
- PSNI collaborating with councils regarding awareness of signs of MS in terms of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Collaborative working with PCSPs (although this was delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak)

The outcome of these actions should be of significant value to the delivery of the strategy, particularly when statistical evidence in relation to modern slavery suggests that modern slavery offences are largely being hidden in plain sight across local communities in which local government have such a direct daily presence.

However, in order to build upon these activities Mid Ulster District Council would welcome further local authority focused actions being included within the updated strategy. These actions could include:

- The provision of additional learning and development support as well as the provision of relevant information for Council officers, in order for them to understand how modern slavery can be identified.
- Training and awareness raising could be focused towards council staff who work directly with members of the public in service areas where modern slavery could be identified e.g. Parks services, public convenience provision, refuse collection, Environmental Health provision, Houses of Multiple Occupation and town centre regeneration.
- Council could also benefit from further guidance on how to inform and/or take part in joint working with the relevant statutory bodies to achieve the overall strategy aim of Pursue, Protect and Prevent.
- Guidance for including modern slavery in Vulnerable Adult and Safeguarding policies would also be useful.
- The provision of training and awareness raising of modern slavery for Designated Safeguarding Officers. This could be similar to the inclusion in recent years of elder abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

As such, Mid Ulster District Council would support local government playing a more active role in relation to awareness raising of the signs of modern slavery and how The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 is actively being enforced. This is a role that Council officers already play in relation to reporting safeguarding issues and concerns to

Social Services Gateway Team and/or the Public Protection Unit of the PSNI. Therefore including and placing a focus on identifying and reporting suspected cases of modern slavery would be straight-forward to implement, if Councils were provided with the support and guidance outlined above. Council's social media platforms could also be used as an awareness raising tool amongst the public, highlighting how the public can identify and report suspected cases of modern slavery.

Mid Ulster District Council look forward to the implementation of a robust Modern Slavery Strategy for 2021/22. The Council hope that the strategy will achieve its aim of pursuing the perpetrators of modern slavery, protect our people from becoming victims of modern slavery and prevent further occurrences.

Yours sincerely

Cathal Mallaghan

Chairman, Mid Ulster District Council