



Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Statement (Financial Year 2025-2026)

Introduction

Durham County Council is committed to safeguarding people from harm and promoting safe, resilient communities. As a local authority, employer, commissioner, procurer, and community leader, we recognise our responsibility to prevent, identify, and respond to modern slavery and human trafficking in all its forms.

We are committed to understanding and addressing the risks of exploitation within our own organisation, across our supply chains and throughout the communities we serve.

'Caring for our People' is a key priority within our Council Plan and that extends to ensuring those most vulnerable are protected from harm, abuse or neglect and exploitation. This includes monitoring emerging risks, strengthening safeguarding arrangements and working with partners and networks to identify and support individuals who may be at risk of harm. It includes continuing to commission services in ways that support a sustainable, ethical and high-quality care market. That approach is reflected in our [Corporate Procurement Strategy 2026-2030](#). The Council has adopted a practical and ambitious approach to ensure the wellbeing of our communities and supported by our [Social Value Strategy 2026-2030](#).

The Council procures and commissions a diverse range of goods, works and services across sectors including health and social care, construction, infrastructure, environmental services and commercial activity. We recognise that the nature and scale of that activity require robust arrangements to understand and manage modern slavery risks. As a Council we are committed to maintaining oversight of our markets, suppliers, contracts and workforce arrangements and for continued change and improvement activity.

This statement sets out our understanding of modern slavery and human trafficking and key activity in 2025-2026 to prevent and identify its occurrence in the Council's own business and in our communities. It includes key information across policies, supply chains and due diligence, training, partnership activity and assurance. It aims to demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement, collaborative working and maintaining awareness of emerging legislation and guidance and best practice to strengthen our response to this serious form of exploitation.

What we know about Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

We know that modern slavery is a serious crime and violation of fundamental human rights. It encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. It also includes other forms of exploitation where individuals are coerced, deceived, controlled or forced into situations for the benefit of others. Victims may

experience physical, psychological, emotional or financial harm and are often subjected to abuse, intimidation, threats and inhumane treatment¹.

Modern slavery and human trafficking can affect people of any age, gender, ethnicity, nationality or background. It can occur through organised crime or by individuals. As a Council, we recognise our responsibility to raise awareness, support prevention, and equip our workforce to recognise the signs and indicators of exploitation and ensure concerns are reported through appropriate safeguarding and criminal justice routes.

We know that certain circumstances can increase the vulnerability to exploitation. Factors like poverty, homelessness, social isolation, disability, mental ill-health, substance use, and lack of education, unstable social and political conditions, climate change and other issues can increase the vulnerability.²

We know that some of the types of modern slavery that exist are (not limited to):

- Criminal Exploitation – being coerced, deceived or made/groomed by others into committing crime
- Domestic Servitude – being made to work within a home for little or no money
- Forced Labour and Debt Bondage – being forced or made to work for little or no money or to pay debt
- Organ Harvesting/Egg harvesting – bodily organs being removed for financial gain
- Sexual Exploitation – being coerced or forced into sexual activity

In addition, some people may be trafficked and made to enter into a [forced/sham marriage](#). The Home Office has a specialist unit for [forced marriage](#).

We will continue to promote to our workforce the message that ‘it’s everybody’s and an everyday role to prevent abuse’. Sharing and signposting to related advice and information for example, the [Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner - Local Government and Modern Slavery](#) awareness raising resource(s) and the [Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline](#)

Understanding the Risk

Nationally, modern slavery continues to represent a growing challenge. The latest Home Office data published in the annual summary for 2025 tells us that around 23,411³ potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking were referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and represents a 22 per cent increase compared to the previous year (19,125). This is the highest annual number since the NRM was introduced.

We also know that it has mostly affected UK (5,110, 22 per cent), Eritrean (3,083, 13 per cent) and Vietnamese (1,998, 9 per cent) groups.

A ‘duty to notify’ (DtN) exists in England and Wales for key agencies known as ‘first responders’. In 2025, the Home Office received 7,130 reports of adult potential victims via the DtN, the highest in a single year since the DtN began.

¹ [Modern slavery strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

² [Unseen \(unseenuk.org\)](#)

³ Source: [Modern Slavery: NRM and DtN statistics, end of year summary 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

We know that labour exploitation has continued to be the most common referral reason for adults and criminal exploitation the most commonly reported reason for children in 2025. We know this from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) data.

From published data, we know that locally key partners such as the Police make referrals through the NRM for both children and adults.

As a Council and a first responder we also have a duty to make referrals. For the fiscal year 2025-2026, Durham County Council referred 13 potential victims (5 adults and 8 children).

Some victims will fall within statutory safeguarding frameworks, for example, when an adult with care and support needs is a potential victim of modern slavery. In 2025-2026, 2 out of the 5 potential adult victims were also referred to adult social care in line with local safeguarding adults policy.

Section 54 of ‘the Act’

As a Council we are committed to ensuring modern slavery does not exist within our supply chains in line with Section 54 of ‘the Act’. This can be shown by our continued commitment to publish our Modern Slavery Statement spanning several years.

Our Role

Durham County Council as a public sector organisation, employer, community leader and a procurer is committed to undertaking a preventative approach to modern slavery and human trafficking within its corporate responsibilities and activities. This also includes co-operating with partners and internal services, such as, adult care, human resources, and corporate procurement to support working towards the disruption of such activities.

The Council is an active member of the local Anti-Slavery Network (ASN). The local Anti-Slavery Network was commissioned by the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in 2022. The network has brought opportunity to strengthen links with our safeguarding partnerships and engage a range of agencies in working together to understand the size and prevalence of the issue at a local level and supporting the local response.

Representation at the local Anti-Slavery Network forum includes (not exhaustive):

Police and Crime Commissioner

and

- Durham County Council
- Darlington Borough Council

and

- Durham Constabulary
- Probation Service
- County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
- County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

Agencies linked into the network include (not exhaustive):

- Ashiana
- Barnardos
- Believe Housing
- Changing Lives
- Coloured Hearts
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Durham Action on Single Housing (DASH)
- Halo Project
- Humankind
- Mountain Healthcare
- Salvation Army
- The Children's Society
- Waythrough
- We Are Causeway

and

- Faith and Education Sector representation
- Durham Safeguarding Adult Partnership
- Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Darlington Safeguarding Partnerships

Our local safeguarding partnerships continue to share key messages with Council staff and wider partners about modern slavery and human trafficking and in a variety of ways:

If you SEE IT, REPORT IT. If you are concerned that you, a child, or an adult may be a victim of modern slavery or human trafficking, TELL SOMEONE:

Always call 999 in an emergency.

Call 101 for Police

Call Social Care Direct on 03000 267979

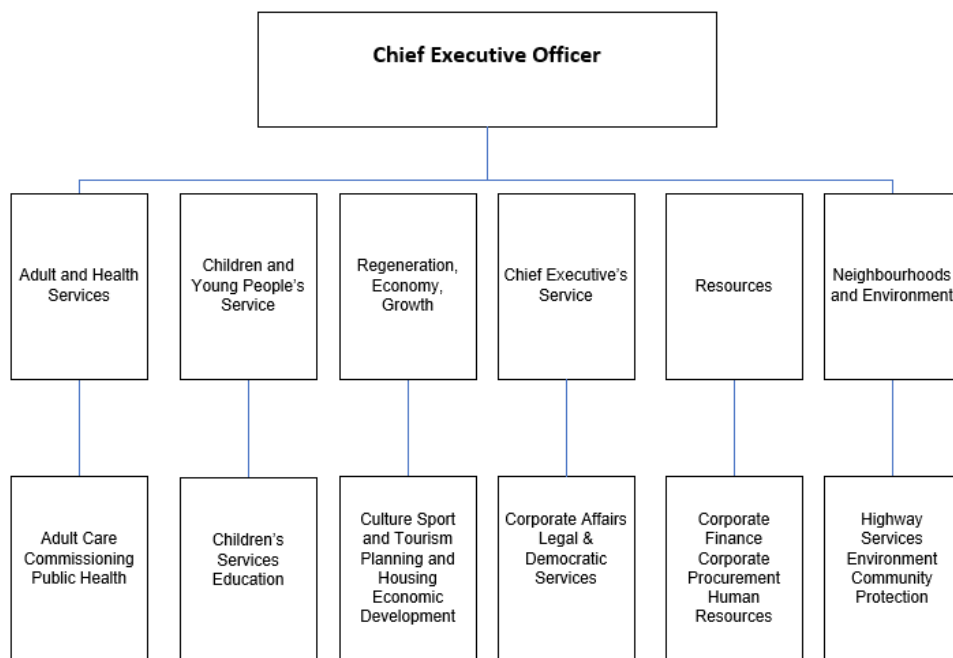
For advice and information or confidential support call the helpline free on [08000 121 700](tel:08000121700)

Our Organisational Structure

County Durham is the largest local authority in the Northeast of England. The population is projected to continue growing and has increased from approximately 513,000 residents in 2011 to around 539,100 in 2025. Durham County Council provides a range of services, including Children's Services, Adult and Health Services, Public Health, and Environmental Services. The Council directly delivers some services but also works in partnership with other organisations and commissions and procures services externally. In 2025-2026 the total third party spend was over £958 million. Specific services covered by this statement illustrated in the structure below.

Our Council Structure⁴

⁴ 2025 Structure



The Council recognises that tackling modern slavery and human trafficking requires robust governance, effective partnership working and shared accountability. Through the local Anti-Slavery Network statutory and non-statutory organisations work together to prevent, identify and respond to modern slavery. Assurance regarding local arrangements is supported by the County Durham and Darlington Anti-Slavery Network and through the Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership (DSAP). Whilst the DSAP primary focus is safeguarding adults with care and support needs, the cross-cutting nature of exploitation is also aligned to the wider partnerships in terms of prevention and early intervention.

The Council as a lead statutory partner of safeguarding partnerships signposts to their respective websites where a range of advice and information is available:

[Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership](#)
[Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

Supply Chains

There is a clear expectation that external services or goods procured by the Council be undertaken in conjunction with organisations operating their own policy and practice in relation to modern slavery.

All suppliers bidding in Durham County Council's procurement processes must state whether they are a relevant commercial organisation as defined by section 54 ("Transparency in Supply Chains etc.") of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 ("the Act").

The Council applies the exclusion provisions contained within the Procurement Act 2023 when undertaking procurement activity. Suppliers are required to comply with the relevant obligations, including those relating to modern slavery and human trafficking. Where mandatory exclusion grounds apply, suppliers may be excluded from procurement processes. The Council also has regard to the centrally published UK Government

Debarment List, which identifies suppliers that have been subject to formal debarment decisions under the Procurement Act 2023.

The approach adopted by the Council is in line with that developed by Crown Commercial Services (CCS), the executive agency and trading fund of the Cabinet Office of the UK Government and is utilised nationally across the public sector as outlined in the Procurement Policy Note 02/2023: Tackling Modern Slavery in Government Supply Chains⁵.

Durham County Council has an expectation that any organisation with which we work, commission a service or procure a service from, operates appropriate policy and practice in relation to modern slavery.

Supporting Prevention and Our Responsibilities

Durham County Council has a corporate crosscutting role for prevention as an employer, community leader and procurer with responsibility to safeguard people within our communities.

This extends responsibilities to Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Housing, Corporate Procurement, Human Resources as well as Community Protection. In line with requirements placed upon Durham County Council we are committed to ensuring there is no place for modern slavery and/or human trafficking of our staff.

Durham County Council works closely with the local Anti-Slavery Network, Durham Constabulary and other enforcement agencies as appropriate to share intelligence and work collaboratively to address issues relating to modern slavery or human trafficking. We continue to work with partners and the voluntary and community sector to develop guidance and pathways to signpost potential victims for appropriate support.

In 2024-2025 we shared that the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner and the County Durham Anti-Slavery Network were supporting local partners through the provision of an extensive training programme for Anti-Slavery Champions. The programme was supported by key voluntary and community sector organisations with the relevant expertise of working with victims of modern slavery and trafficking. Agencies accessing that training have included Durham County Council, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, Housing Providers and Probation Services.

There have since been two cohorts to access the programme. This programme was recognised within [*Policing Response to Modern Slavery: How has it changed in the last 10 Years, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner \(July 2025\)*](#).

There are four Anti-Slavery Champions within the Council and across Adult and Health Services, Public Health and Children and Young People's Services. They offer advice and guidance to professionals and practitioners and following the successful completion of the ASN programme.

⁵ [PPN 02/23: Tackling Modern Slavery in Government Supply Chains - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Since that training, there has been an increase in referrals onto the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and signposting to the relevant support services.

One of our Anti-Slavery Champions is aligned to Adult and Health Services and has delivered and raised awareness with front line staff through a 'Focus on Practice Forum' which is attended by local authority staff across all social care disciplines.

A peer support mechanism for the Anti-Slavery Champions will be in place for 2025-2026 and through our local Anti-Slavery Network. This will offer opportunity for Council Officers and personnel from a range of agencies to discuss any barriers and emerging good practice in a safe and supportive space.

As a first responder organisation, our Adult and Health Services Directorate have given steer to the local Safeguarding Adults Partnership to support with further awareness raising in 2025-2026. This will include raising awareness of the role of the [County Durham Anti-Slavery Network](#) and its support and training opportunities for professionals and pathways. The Safeguarding Adults Partnership will also link with the Anti-Slavery Champions to review our guidance and pathways. That work will build upon the role of the Anti-Slavery Champions within the Council.

Regular communications are shared through the Adult Care News Bulletins to ensure staff receive up to date information relating to the National Referral Mechanism and any related support offer.

As a Council we work with other agencies to prevent any form of mistreatment or abuse occurring and should it occur, we want to ensure that our staff remain equipped with the relevant knowledge they need to respond appropriately and are informed of what they should do.

Policies Supporting Prevention

The Council has a range of policies, procedures and governance arrangements that support the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking and promote ethical, safe and inclusive working practices.

- *Code of Our Values, Behaviours and Conduct (2026)* – Establishes the standards of behaviour expected of all employees, including treating people with dignity and respect and fairness. Compliance is supported through mandatory learning and development for all staff.
- *Confidential Reporting Code (2026)* – Promotes openness, honesty and accountability by providing employees, former employees, agency workers, contractors and suppliers with mechanisms to raise concerns about wrongdoing. It includes any concerns relating to modern slavery, exploitation or unethical practice within Council activities or supply chains. The Confidential Reporting Form is made readily accessible to all employees.
- *Equality Policy (2024-2028)* – Demonstrates the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in employment, service delivery, commissioning and procurement. Equality considerations are embedded within decision-making, procurement activity and partnership working. Equality is therefore considered and

embedded in the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2026-2030 to ensure procurement contributes to 'Caring for our People' by reducing inequalities and improving access to opportunity and supports ensuring our commissioned services are appropriate and responsive to different groups. Integrating our communities is also supported through close working with Durham Police under our Safe Durham Partnership to tackle underlying causes of crime and adverse behaviours affecting our communities, which extends to sexual violence and other violent crime. The effectiveness of procurement activity can drive progress in equality and embed real improvement.

- *Corporate Procurement Strategy (2026-2030)* – The Council's Procurement Strategy supports the delivery of the [County Durham Vision 2035](#) and Council priorities through effective commissioning and procurement of goods, works and services. Aligned with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023 and the [National Procurement Policy Statement \(2025\)](#), the strategy promotes transparent, accountable and value-driven procurement that delivers economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities.

The Council is committed to ensuring that commissioning and procurement activity is undertaken in an ethical and responsive manner, with appropriate considerations given to modern slavery, labour exploitation, workforce practices and wider supply chain risks. Procurement processes are designed to support fair competition, encourage responsible suppliers, embed social value principles and ensure public funds are spent effectively.

Modern slavery considerations form part of the Council's wider approach to supplier assurance, contract management and risk management. High risk contracts and supply chains are subject to proportionate due diligence and monitoring arrangements to support compliance with relevant legislation and expected standards of conduct.

The Council continues to promote ethical procurement practices and workforce capability through ongoing professional development. Procurement and Contract management personnel receive training to support compliance with procurement legislation, contract management responsibilities and the identification and management of risks associated with modern slavery and exploitation within supply chains. Corporate Procurement staff previously completed the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) training for Ethical Procurement & Supply and in turn, secured the Corporate Ethics kitemark. Corporate Procurement are committed to maintaining its CIPS ethical charter with the status achieved for a fifth consecutive year.

- *Recruitment and Selection Policy (2026)* – The Council operates robust recruitment and employment practices designed to ensure compliance with employment legislation and reduce the risk of exploitation. Appropriate pre-employment checks are undertaken for all employees and agency workers, including right to work verification, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks where required and employment history checks. The Council also seeks assurance that employment agencies and recruitment providers comply with their responsibilities under relevant legislation including the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

- *Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence* – Through the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) and wider safeguarding arrangements, the Council works with partners to prevent and protect vulnerable people from harm. It includes domestic abuse, sexual violence, sexual exploitation and supporting victims and reducing the associated harm through working with partners and services available to address needs. It includes improving the criminal justice response to tackling domestic abuse, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation.
- *Safeguarding People in our Communities* - The Council has a duty to safeguard people in our communities and for ensuring policies are in place to protect vulnerable groups from harm and abuse. The Care Act 2014 sets out duties in relation to safeguarding adults and for children the duty comes from the Children Act 1989 and 2004. [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#) sets out the expectations of all agencies involved in the safeguarding function. All Children and Adult Care teams of the Council hold responsibilities to meet these duties daily. The Council has established a dedicated team to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who may have experienced human trafficking and exploitation during their travel to Durham and are committed to supporting them to recover and thrive in communities. The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership provides comprehensive practice guidance and multi-agency procedures for safeguarding children who may be at risk of trafficking, modern slavery, or other forms of exploitation.

These arrangements support the Council's commissioning and procurement responsibilities by ensuring that providers delivering services on behalf of the Council understand and meet safeguarding expectations, maintain effective workforce practices, and contribute to the identification, reporting, and prevention of exploitation. It extends to children's residential care, foster care and supported accommodation, adult social care, transport services, housing support, and voluntary and community sector contracts.

- *Trade Unions* – The Council maintains regular engagement and consultation with recognised Trade Unions on matters relating to employee wellbeing, working conditions, health and safety, organisational change and workforce policy. These arrangements provide an important mechanism for employee voice, constructive challenge and the early identification of workplace concerns. Through partnership working with Trade Unions the Council promotes fair employment practices, workforce wellbeing and a culture where concerns can be raised safely, supporting the wider prevention of exploitation, abuse and unethical working practices.
- *Staff Networks* – there are a number of staff network groups administered by the Equality and Diversity and HR Teams. These networks serve to give a voice to staff and act as a platform for staff to share any concerns in a safe and confidential environment. Staff are encouraged to join and attend these networks to share experiences, shape working environments and access support. One example is the Race, Equality and Diversity staff network. A wide range of information is accessible to staff across all service groupings. This extends to modern slavery and human trafficking.

- Anchor Networks – in addition to staffing networks, the Council is a contributive member in a wide range of anchor networks such as the Association of Directors for Adult Social Services (ADASS), and Northeast ADASS, Inclusion and Economic forums, as well as leading on a number of networks including the Community Wealth Building Network and County Durham Pound.

Multi-agency arrangements

The Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership in line with statutory requirements set out within the Care Act 2014 have an agreed multi-agency safeguarding policy and procedure in place. Regular review across a broad range of policy and practice takes place.

These partnerships continue to work in collaboration with the wider safeguarding system where there are links, for example, the Safe Durham Partnership multi-agency domestic abuse referral pathway.

The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership have up to date on-line procedures in relation to domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, and modern slavery.

Training & Awareness Raising

To meet its statutory safeguarding responsibilities, the Council offers a wide and extensive training programmes to staff across all services.

The Council's learning and development system hosts a range of internal and external training opportunities for its workforce. Training opportunity examples include (not exhaustive):

- Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery (developed by the Home Office and Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) UK and the Virtual College)
- Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery – e-learning
- Modern Slavery – Legislation and Identifying Signs
- Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation
- Understanding Gangs and Exploitation from a Child's Perspective
- Child Sexual Exploitation – Signs, Risks and Interventions
- Criminal Exploitation and County Lines
- Preventing Human Trafficking Risks for Ukrainian Refugees (guidance) and Modern Slavery e-learning. These learning opportunities are open to all staff
- Safety for Business – Modern Slavery – E-learning – to support staff in identifying the signs and indicators and how to report concerns

For the period of this statement 779 Council Staff accessed a range of training (inclusive of the above) and where key messages of modern slavery, human trafficking and exploitation were included.

The Council recognises the growing links between modern slavery, criminal exploitation and home takeover (commonly referred to as 'cuckooing'). We know it can occur when individuals and organised criminal groups take control of a person's home and use that property to facilitate criminal activity. Through our local partnership working and commissioned services the Council works with partners to identify, prevent and respond to

exploitation associated with cuckooing, county lines activity and organised crime through legislative responsibilities and statutory safeguarding frameworks.

The Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership and Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership continue to provide a range of training including regular related briefings about Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking and face to face and online training opportunities through a variety of events. These include key briefings and resources such as, Cuckooing (Home Takeover) which can be strongly linked to exploitation, coercion and control and in some cases modern slavery and human trafficking.

The Council continues to share safeguarding partnership resources to ensure up to date information on a range of related topics is shared across services. This includes sharing information about the reporting mechanisms such as mobile applications, the [Unseen App](#) and the [Stop App](#) and social media campaigns, consultations and any national and/or annual Modern Slavery reports and related guidance.

In 2025-2026 the Council and wider partners were supported by the DSAP with access to revised resources, which included, *The Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards*, *Human Trafficking Foundation* (2025), that resource is endorsed and supported by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

The Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership has continued to share a range of information and messages with partner agencies including the Council. In 2025-2026, the partnership shared seven key updates covering a range of modern slavery and human trafficking related topics. These included launch of the new service: North East Exploitation & Sex Worker Project by Durham Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and updates on the Fair Work Agency.

During Safeguarding Adults Week 2025 a range of resources were shared across partners including the Council, to raise awareness. This included launch of the 'Home Takeover -Targeted and Trapped' animation' and information relating to the '[Tom](#)' [Safeguarding Adults Review](#) published by the West Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board. The review highlighted Tom's lived experiences of abuse and exploitation and provided important learning for practitioners and professionals. Tom's partner and his live-in carer were subsequently convicted of modern slavery offences.⁶ The Safeguarding Adult Partnership and the wider partnerships regularly share local and national learning.

As a Council we continue to work towards strengthening links through multi-agency working and communicating with internal/external colleagues.

We actively encourage staff to access the [Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) and the [Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership](#) website pages.

Recognising, reporting and responding to modern slavery and human trafficking is embedded within the Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership training programmes and in collaboration and consultation with Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary and wider networks including the Anti-Slavery Network.

Key training competencies include recognising signs and indicators of modern slavery and human trafficking, recognising indicators of forced labour, how and where to share

⁶ [SAR Tom Learning Briefing](#)

intelligence, local referral pathways for potential victims and how to make reports to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and raised awareness of the potential support needs for victims, and accessible support for example, [the National Modern Slavery Care Contract \(MSVCC\)](#).

If any staff witness or suspect modern slavery or human trafficking is taking place, they can seek advice and support from our internal anti-slavery champions, internal/external colleagues, from our policies and from a range of websites. For example, promotion of confidential/whistleblowing reporting for concerns relating to suppliers. In line with statutory responsibilities and related guidance for local authorities as a [first responder](#), the Council, police and others, may need to make a notification where a potential victim of modern slavery is identified to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

As a member of the local Anti-Slavery Network (ASN) the Council was supportive of the network's approach to training needs analysis (2023) to develop a tiered approach to local modern slavery and human trafficking training. The Council actively contributed to that development. The Council will further support the network approach to training and development, a new Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Workbook is anticipated and will be shared across the workforce, it forms part of the ongoing learning offer from the ASN, open to Council staff.

The Council continues to be supportive of the ASN ambition to develop a pool of staff across a range of agencies who will champion the preventative approach to modern slavery and human trafficking. With staff completing that training for two consecutive years, for the Council and wider agencies. Our anti-slavery champions are already acting as single points of contacts should concerns arise for people in our communities or our services.

The Council will continue to support the local Anti-Slavery Network and the Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership by promoting awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking, sharing learning and intelligence, and supporting the identification, reporting and safeguarding of potential victims in line with statutory guidance and Duty to Notify requirements.

As a statutory partner of both the Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership and Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Council remains committed to raising the profile of modern slavery and human trafficking and strengthening the multi-agency response. This includes review of relevant safeguarding frameworks for cross-connectivity of agendas. In 2025 Chief Officers reviewed the local safeguarding framework across the Safeguarding Children, Adults and Safe Durham Partnerships.

Awareness raising remains a priority and is supported through safeguarding partnership communications, newsletters, Council intranet pages and regular workforce communications. Through collaboration with local, regional and national networks the Council will continue to share learning, emerging legislation and guidance, best practice and intelligence to strengthen the Council support for prevention and early intervention and to improve outcomes for people and communities.

Due Diligence

Durham County Council is committed to and understands the vital role procurement plays in its functions. This includes the consideration and recognition when sourcing any provision that effective employment practice takes place, and all modern slavery and human trafficking practices are discouraged.

Due diligence actions must be carried out at all times in collaboration, between Contract Managers and Procurement Officers, to ensure before awarding any contracts to prospective bidders the Council meets its legal obligations under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Internal commissioners of social care provision continue to undertake a range of activity such as site visits to local offices, checking records for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and Right to Work in the UK documentation, staff training records, and that the relevant internal infrastructures are in place to reduce risk.

Where suppliers fail to meet their appropriate obligations under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the issue should be raised by the assigned Contract Manager, in order to protect the Council's reputation and remain compliant under the regulations going forward.

Regular monitoring and assurance activities take place to ensure compliance of suppliers' obligations under the Modern Slavery Act by all Local Authorities.

As an authority with a role in commissioning social care provision, we continue to stay abreast of changes. Our social care commissioning officers continue to be mindful of related research of 'labour exploitation in the care sector', and of the size and nature of the issue and of ['establishing modern slavery risk assessment and due diligence in adult social care'](#).

Durham County Council has contributed to the development of an organisational abuse toolkit, working alongside North East Association of Directors for Adult Social Services (NE ADASS) colleagues. In our previous statement we advised that the document was endorsed in September 2024, the document is due review in 2026. It includes messages for local authorities, and health and social care personnel providers to be minded to the Department of Health and Social Care [code of practice guidance](#) relating to 'international recruitment'. That guidance echoes the approach taken by our local authority to ensure we uphold ethical recruitment and employment practices.

The Council recognises emerging risks associated with international recruitment within the adult social care workforce. Commissioners and contract managers will continue to monitor recruitment practices and employment conditions, ensuring alignment with DHSC international recruitment guidance and safeguarding responsibilities. Durham County Council and through NE ADASS continue to support adult social care providers with international recruitment. The Council continues to support displaced workers in our local authority area to find new sponsors in the sector.

The Council equally recognises the relevance of employment rights legislation to the prevention of labour exploitation and modern slavery beyond procurement compliance. The introduction of the Fair Work Agency strengthens oversight of employment standards and labour market employment and worker protections. This offers additional assurance mechanisms across sectors where modern slavery risks can commonly exist. The Council will continue to consider workforce welfare, employment practices and labour exploitation when commissioning, procuring and monitoring services, particularly within higher risk supply chains. The Council will pay particular attention to sectors where there may be increased vulnerability to exploitation including adult social care, recruitment and

agency staffing, and cleaning and facilities management. Supplier assurance, due diligence and contract monitoring of the Council seeks to promote lawful working practices and conditions. The reforms place a stronger emphasis on employee protections and on reporting of concerns through confidential reporting (whistleblowing) processes; the Council will take forward activity into 2026-2027 and as the reforms are implemented.

In addition, through its County Durham Care Academy the Council is supporting the adult social care providers and suppliers with advice, information and signposting to a range of resources and toolkits, via its [website](#).

Management Responsibilities

The Council has responsibilities to its workforce, this includes employee health, safety and welfare.

As part of the Council commitment to the welfare of its workforce, any employee can raise concerns and have assurance from the Council that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Managers regularly undertake supervision or 1-1 sessions with staff during which health and safety or health and wellbeing concerns that an employee may have can be discussed.

The Council also offers work related and personal advice and support to its employees covering a broad range of issues from better health at work, to victims of crime. Employees have access to an Employee Assistance Programme which includes 24-hour confidential support, 365 days per year and contacts for external support.

Performance, Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Durham County Council is committed to effective oversight of modern slavery and human trafficking through robust performance monitoring, quality assurance and partnership intelligence. A Chief Officer Safeguarding Group regularly receives exception reporting where an emerging concern has been identified. It could include any concerns for patterns for exploitation, modern slavery or human trafficking.

The Council monitors a range of corporate, safeguarding and commissioning indicators to identify emerging risks, trends and opportunities for improvement. This includes reviewing local and national intelligence, safeguarding activity, quality assurance findings and information relating to commissioned services and supply chains.

Modern slavery is monitored through established safeguarding arrangements including data collected through the statutory Safeguarding Adults Collection. The Council also reviews information relating to exploitation, modern slavery, human trafficking and provider concerns to support the early identification of risk and strengthen preventative activity.

The Council remains committed to working with local safeguarding partners, Durham Constabulary and the County Durham and Darlington Anti-Slavery Network. The Council continues to widen its understanding of the prevalence and characteristics of modern slavery in County Durham. Partnership intelligence sharing, audit activity and performance reporting help to inform our local priorities, workforce development and service

improvement activity. The local Safeguarding Adults Partnership is driving some of that activity as part of its review of multi-agency data sets.

In the 2025-2026 the DSAP included sexual exploitation within its audit programme. The Council will support that activity as a key and lead statutory agency of the partnership.

The Council recognises that understanding modern slavery requires a whole-system approach. We will continue to work with partners to improve data quality, strengthen intelligence sharing, monitor safeguarding and commissioning activity, and develop a clearer understanding of local risks, emerging trends and effectiveness of our response through our links to expertise and support and the local Anti-Slavery Network.

The Council continues to meet the Best Value Duty, a statutory requirement for local authorities under Section 26 of the Local Government Act 1999 and continues its work in this area to meet the appropriate obligations.

Looking ahead 2026-2027

In 2026-2027, we will continue our commitment to improving through our partnership links and our contributions to wider multi-agency work and activity for modern slavery and human trafficking. This will include supporting any review of local multi-agency modern slavery pathways, promoting the external networks and learning offers, increasing workforce awareness and strengthening supplier assurance where appropriate.

Declaration

This statement is made pursuant to Section 54 (1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and constitutes Durham County Council's slavery and human trafficking statement for the term of the financial period of 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026. The statement is subject to continual annual review and will be published on the Council's website.