

Thurrock Council

Modern slavery and human trafficking statement

April 2022 to March 2023.

This statement is made in accordance with Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and recognises the role that Thurrock Council has in tackling modern slavery and human trafficking.

Thurrock Council opposes modern slavery and human trafficking and is committed to ensuring that such practices have no place within our business supply chains or other activities. Modern slavery is a term used to encapsulate both offences in the Modern Slavery Act:

- slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour
- human trafficking

The offences are set out in Section 1 and Section 2 of the Act.

Thurrock is a local council situated in the county of Essex, located on the north side of the river Thames, immediately to the east of London.

Thurrock is at the heart of global trade and logistics, with 3 international ports along 18 miles of riverfront, and with major road intersections within the borough geographically Thurrock presents an increased risk of exploitation by Organised Immigration Crime in relation to the trafficking of people through borders. As seen in the tragic case of Operation Melrose, which resulted in the death of 39 Vietnamese men, women and children this can be highly dangerous and ultimately cost lives with victims being treated as a commodity.

The population is estimated to be 174,300. Thurrock Council is a unitary council. It has responsibility to deliver all local government services within a district. Examples of these services include, but are not limited to education, libraries, roads, social care, environmental services, public protection, planning and development and housing.

Local authorities are central to the fight against modern slavery. Modern slavery intersects with many different areas that councils are involved with and a number of different officers might come across it while going about their everyday activities. Examples where officers might come across victims include housing and homelessness services, community safety work, trading standards, licensing services, social services and customer services.

Due diligence and risk management

The Council continues to strive to enhance its current processes and controls to protect against any form of Modern Slavery within its supply chain. As part of our Procurement process, our Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ) includes appropriate questions requiring potential bidders to evidence their compliance with the Modern Slavery Act if they are a relevant commercial organisation as defined by Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Failure to evidence compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015 results in the potential bidder's SQ being treated as ineligible for the contract opportunity.

The Council requires its contractors and subcontractors engaged in 'regulated activity' for children and adults at risk to have safeguarding policies, procedures and training in place and to comply with the reporting procedures in the SET (Southend, Essex, Thurrock) Safeguarding policies.

What we expect from suppliers and stakeholders

To continue to improve processes and controls protecting against Modern Slavery we will, as appropriate:

- provide refresher training on Modern Slavery for all Procurement and key staff across the Council
- work with supplier and stakeholders to identify procurement categories and areas which are susceptible and are at risk of modern slavery to facilitate putting in place appropriate measures to mitigate the risks
- incorporate performance measures within contracts and monitoring of these particularly in identified high risk procurement categories / areas to enable early resolutions of identified issues

What we will do to ensure compliance

We will:

- include appropriate clauses in contracts requiring compliance with the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 within the supply chain as well as setting out consequences for breaching the clause

The Council's Whistleblowing Policy is intended to make it easier to disclose information without fear of discrimination and victimisation and should be used by anyone concerned that reports of MDS are not being taken seriously or are being ignored.

What we will achieve this year

1. Section 52 of the Act imposes a duty on public authorities, including local authorities, to notify the Secretary of State of suspected victims of slavery or human trafficking. Thurrock Council will build upon the proactive awareness raising already carried out in 2020. The existing training is primarily for frontline practitioners and is delivered online by an external organisation due to national COVID-19 restrictions. The training not only raises awareness of the duty, but also how to identify, refer and support victims.
2. We will continue to review internal documentation to ensure it reflects modern slavery and human trafficking awareness and signposting where appropriate.
3. We will progress the modern slavery actions within our refreshed Modern Day Slavery Strategy 2022-25
4. We will continue to explore collaborative communication opportunities with our colleagues and partners across Essex on modern slavery and human trafficking, aiming to provide consistent messaging and response across Thurrock and wider Essex.

This statement will be updated annually. Next statement due April 2023.