

The Development of a Preliminary Training Framework for Local Authorities as Modern Slavery First Responders in England and Wales

Executive summary

Modern Slavery (MS) is a serious and growing issue in England and Wales and Local Authorities (LAs) play a key role in identifying and supporting survivors. However, many LAs face challenges in fully adopting their legal responsibilities as First Responders (FRs). This report explores these challenges and opportunities, focusing on improving training, awareness, and collaboration to strengthen the local response to MS.

Why focus on local authorities?

LAs are responsible for housing, social care, education and safeguarding, services that survivors of MS often use and seek help from. However, research shows that frontline staff may lack the necessary training and awareness to recognise cases of exploitation and respond effectively. While the Modern Slavery Act 2015 sets out clear legal obligations for LAs to prevent, identify and offer support to these survivors, they often struggle with limited resources, inconsistent training and gaps in inter-agency collaboration.

What does this study do?

This research was conducted to better understand the role of LAs in tackling MS and to identify ways to improve their response. A multi-phase study was carried out, including:

- **Reviewing** modern slavery statements (MSSs) published by LAs.
- **Surveying** council specialist staff to assess their knowledge, training, and experiences.
- **Interviewing** MS Leads at the LAs to gain deeper insights into the challenges they face.

Key findings

The study identified several barriers and areas for improvement:

1. **Limited awareness and training:** Many LAs staff are unaware of their role as FRs. Training, where available, is often inconsistent and not tailored to local needs. Some staff assume that only the police can deal with MS cases.
2. **Fragmented responses:** While some councils have strong MS policies, others lack clear processes for identifying and supporting survivors. This results in an inconsistent approach across different regions.
3. **Barriers to multi-agency working:** Effective MS response requires collaboration between LAs, law enforcement, and community groups. However, miscommunication, lack of trust, and unclear responsibilities hinder joint efforts.
4. **Gaps in supply chain oversight:** LAs have a legal duty to monitor their supply chains for potential exploitation, but reporting is inconsistent and many councils lack the resources to conduct thorough checks.
5. **Examples of good practice:** Some LAs have developed strong partnerships with community organisations, invested in specialist MS teams, and introduced innovative training approaches. These examples highlight what is possible with the right strategies in place.

Preliminary training framework and recommendations for improvement

Based on the findings, the report suggests several actions to strengthen the role of LAs as First Responders:

- **Standardise training:** Introduce a nationally recognised, three-tier training framework:
 - Tier 1** Basic awareness training for all staff (e-learning).
 - Tier 2** In-depth, face-to-face training for frontline workers and councillors.
 - Tier 3** Advanced training for specialist staff making National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals.
- **Enhance collaboration:** Improve partnerships between LAs, law enforcement, and community organisations to create a more coordinated response.
- **Increase resources:** Secure dedicated funding to support MS training and specialist teams within LAs.
- **Strengthen accountability:** Establish clearer processes for monitoring MS risks in supply chains and reporting on actions taken.
- **Improve communication:** Ensure all staff understand their FR responsibilities and provide clear referral pathways.

Why does this matter?

MS can happen anywhere and LAs are on the frontline of prevention and support and 2 million people work in Local Government. Strengthening their capacity to act as First Responders is critical to ensuring survivors receive the help they need. By improving training, collaboration, and accountability, LAs can play a vital role in tackling MS and protecting vulnerable individuals where there is sometimes distrust of other FRs like the Home Office or Police and others still like charities do not have the resources or national coverage to always respond effectively.

This report highlights the urgent need for action and provides practical recommendations to build a more effective, coordinated response. With the right support, LAs can lead the way in combating MS and making communities safer for everyone.

Importance of your feedback

The training framework proposed here is based on the findings of this exploratory study. This framework is intended to constitute only a preliminary working document, which is currently being shared with our study participants as well as more widely with LAs in England and Wales, MS third sector organisations, other relevant stakeholders and experts-by-experience. We are inviting them to provide feedback on its usefulness, applicability, feasibility, structure and delivery methods and its development into a training curriculum.

The feedback gathered will inform the planned knowledge exchange event in summer 2025, where we aim to co-develop the First Training Framework for Local Authorities as Modern Slavery First Responders in England and Wales.

We value your feedback

Please leave your feedback via **the link provided**.

We appreciate your invaluable feedback and supportive comments.

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In partnership with

The Anti Trafficking Monitoring Group

Preliminary training framework

Tier 1: Basic awareness training for all staff (e-learning)

Purpose

- Equip all LAs employees with a fundamental understanding of ms, including its forms, indicators and associated risks.
- Ensure that staff can recognise potential signs of ms and understand their role in responding effectively.
- Clarify legal obligations related to ms.
- Establish a consistent baseline of knowledge across all departments.

Objectives

- Introduction to MS: definitions, forms and real-world examples.
- Recognising key indicators: risk factors, signs of exploitation, and high-risk environments.
- Legal framework: overview of modern slavery act 2015, NRM and key policies.
- Reporting and referral: steps to take if a case is suspected and how to escalate concerns.

Delivery methods

- E-learning modules for flexibility and cost-effectiveness.
- Short videos and interactive quizzes to reinforce learning.
- Pre- and post-training assessments to evaluate knowledge gains.

Common considerations:

- **Enhance collaboration:** Improve partnerships between LAs, law enforcement, and community organisations to create a more coordinated response.
- **Increase resources:** Secure dedicated funding to support MS training and specialist teams within LAs.
- **Strengthen accountability:** Establish clearer processes for monitoring MS risks in supply chains and reporting on actions taken.
- **Improve communication:** Ensure all staff understand their FR responsibilities and provide clear referral pathways.

Tier 2: In-depth, face-to-face training for frontline workers and councillors

Purpose

- Provide practical training for frontline workers and councillors who engage directly with vulnerable populations.
- Ensure they are equipped to confidently identify, respond to and refer potential cases of ms.
- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration between LAs, law enforcement and community organisations to ensure coordinated action.

Objectives

- Advanced identification skills: recognising complex forms of exploitation.
- First responder training: steps to take when encountering potential victims.
- NRM referral process: a step-by-step guide for reporting cases.
- Legal and procedural responsibilities: understanding supply chain risks and compliance requirements.
- Collaborative working: strengthening partnerships with law enforcement, NGOs, and other agencies.
- Multi-agency coordination: inspired by domestic abuse models, better collaboration can improve information sharing, referrals, and safeguarding.

Delivery methods

- Face to face workshops featuring role-playing and the analysis of real-life case studies.
- Simulation exercises designed to enhance confidence in applying referral procedures.
- Expert-led sessions focused on safeguarding strategies and victim-centred approaches.

Tier 3: Advanced training for specialist staff making NRM referrals

Purpose

- Equip specialist staff with the expert knowledge and skills needed to handle complex cases and make NRM referrals.
- Strengthen case management, risk assessment and victim support mechanisms.
- Reinforce accountability by ensuring clear processes for monitoring MS risks in supply chains and reporting actions taken.

Objectives

- Comprehensive risk assessments: advanced techniques for identifying survivor vulnerabilities.
- Case management and long-term support: ensuring ongoing assistance for survivors.
- Strategic coordination: collaborating with law enforcement, social services, and NGOs to manage cases effectively.
- Supply chain oversight and ethical procurement: monitoring contractor compliance and preventing exploitative practices.
- Accountability and reporting: strengthening internal monitoring systems and ensuring transparent reporting mechanisms.
- Leadership and oversight: an ms lead in each council ensures oversight and strategic focus.
- Legislative readiness: staff should know about possible legal changes affecting ms work.

Delivery methods

- Intensive training workshops featuring in-depth case studies.
- Train-the-trainer model: selected staff will become internal trainers to ensure knowledge retention.
- Scenario-based learning: real-life crisis response simulations.