

**To:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 06 February 2024  
**Report of:** Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire  
**Title of Report:** Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery

Summary and recommendations	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To provide an update on the prevalence of adult exploitation and modern slavery and work being undertaken to address this.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member with responsibility:</b>	Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Safer Communities
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Support Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation(s): That the Committee resolves to:</b>	
1. <b>Note and comment</b> on the report and <b>agree</b> any recommendations.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Oxfordshire Structure

## Introduction and background

1. In partnership with the other Oxfordshire councils and with funding through the Community Safety Fund from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the new role of Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire (ASCO) was introduced in January 2022.
2. The role is to lead on Oxfordshire’s response to adult exploitation and modern slavery and sits within Oxford City Council. Since January 2022, there has been the development of a pathway and multi-agency structure (see **Appendix 1**) in tackling this crime which is included in the “Oxfordshire’s Response to Adult Exploitation Guidance & Pathways” document shared and embedded in all frontline services across Oxfordshire.

## Data Collection

3. A central recording system was developed for collection of relevant data that would ensure a greater understanding of the prevalence of exploitation and modern

slavery and identify trends, threats, risk and harm, thus allowing us to know where we needed to focus targeted work.

4. All cases are referred to the ASCO and the below data in Table 1 covers referrals from January 2022 (when data started being collected) up until the end of December 2023. It shows totals for both Oxford City and Oxfordshire to compare.
5. Any concern around potential exploitation is referred, which can be individuals or premises/businesses/organisations.

Table 1

	<b><u>Total Number of Cases Reported to ASCO</u></b>
Oxford City	126 (101 individual; 25 business/premises)
Oxfordshire	253 (210 individual; 43 business/premises)

6. The numbers encompass direct referrals to ASCO and we also receive data from Thames Valley Police who share details received by them of those referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The NRM data is for victims identified in our area, usually by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and therefore we do not have direct contact with them. For Oxford City, there were 76 direct referrals and 50 from the NRM during the reporting period.
7. It is also important to note that data is collected for both the local authority area where the victim identified resides and the local authority area where exploitation occurred, as this can be different (e.g. someone in labour exploitation may work in Oxford but live in Didcot). So, although there have been 126 cases in the city, these are victims who live in the city and does not encompass those who may be being exploited in the city but live elsewhere.
8. Out of the 126 Oxford City referrals, 88 were exploited in the city. The other 38 were exploited in other areas. There were an additional 43 victims who lived in another authority but were exploited in the city.
9. The cases identified in the city are broken down into the following types of exploitation:

<b><u>Exploitation Classification</u></b>	<b><u>Oxford</u></b>	<b><u>Oxfordshire</u></b>
Criminal Exploitation	32	70
Cultural Exploitation	1	1
Domestic Servitude	5	12
Financial Exploitation	3	14
Labour Exploitation	43	115
Sexual Exploitation	40	46

Unknown	2	4
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10. Labour, Sexual, then Criminal are the City's highest forms of exploitation. Collection of data to determine the categories of exploitation shows the highest being:

- Labour – Domiciliary care, hospitality and retail, car washes
- Sexual – brothels and prostitution
- Criminal – cannabis cultivation, county lines, cuckooing and forced drug dealing and/or concealing drugs.

### Victim Profile

	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Oxfordshire</u>
<b><u>Gender</u></b>		
Female	46	98
Male	57	114
<b><u>Nationality (Top 3)</u></b>		
British	26	58
Albanian	20	35
Romanian	19	19
<b><u>Age Range</u></b>		
18-24	16	31
25-34	22	53
35-44	16	30
45-54	7	15
55-64	2	3
65-74	3	4
75-84	3	0
Unknown	34	72

11. As reports are also for premises or businesses of concern, there will always be some unknown data regarding the number and details of potential victims. Referrals for premises or businesses of concern are logged as one referral until more intelligence is gathered.

### Current Threats and Risk

12. The highest risk across the city and county is exploitation of overseas workers in the care sector. This is also a national issue with an increase in calls to the Modern Slavery Helpline alone increasing by 630%. Across the county, we have seen an increase of over 400% due to concerns with care providers.

13. A lot of work has been carried out in a multi-agency approach to identify and support potential victims and to disrupt those exploiting them. Initially it is a care provider identified as a concern so is recorded as one referral, however it is estimated that we are realistically looking at over 2,500 potential victims across the county on top of the above figures. In the city we have already identified 630 potential victims who we are working to engage with, therefore the actual total for the city is 750 and we are currently exploring ways at how best to record this to show accurate data.
14. Also, the city is identifying a trend in 'landlord exploitation', including guest houses, where they are specifically targeting vulnerable foreign nationals, charging very high rents, overcrowding and potentially using them to 'work' for them. Work has already begun with the HMO team to investigate this.

### **Partnership Working and Outcomes**

15. Modern slavery is one of the most complex crimes to identify, disrupt and investigate and no single agency can tackle modern slavery alone. A comprehensive, joined-up, effective multi-agency approach is required, and our central aim is to use all the means at our joint disposal to disrupt the activity of perpetrators making Oxfordshire a hostile place from which to perpetrate the exploitation of people. To ensure this work is effective, a 4Ps strategy in our approach to tackling modern slavery and exploitation has been implemented, delivered through our multi-agency structure and pathway:
- **Pursue** - prosecute and disrupt individuals and groups responsible for modern slavery and the exploitation of people.
  - **Prevent** - prevent people from engaging in modern slavery and the exploitation of people.
  - **Protect** - strengthen safeguards against modern slavery by protecting vulnerable people from being exploited.
  - **Prepare** - reduce the harm caused by modern slavery through improved victim identification and enhanced support.
16. Over the reporting period, we have worked with over 50 partners in the city, which includes 80 multi-agency meetings and 38 multi-agency joint visits/operations. We have engaged with 76 victims identified living in the city and have supported 43 of those out of the grips of exploitation and continue to work with 33 others.
17. Examples of positive outcomes:
- A brothel was closed which was being run out of a guesthouse with a Closure Order on the property. There were also issues identified of financial exploitation by the landlady to long staying guests which was investigated and reported. Planning enforcement action was taken for use of an outbuilding and a penalty issued for waste issues. There is an ongoing investigation into a potential unlicensed HMO.
  - A brothel in a residential letting was issued with a Closure Order. Notices were issued around rubbish and waste, proceedings started for an illegal HMO and potential action around the landlady of the property who was in bankruptcy but taking rental income.

- We secured immediate safe house accommodation and support through the NRM for a man who was being threatened by a drugs gang and was in fear for his life. He was a British national and it is very rare they are housed through NRM due to the view that they have other options through local authorities, so this was a very positive result.
- We supported several victims of a sexual exploitation 'cult' who were recruited and trafficked abroad. The support helped them to report and work with law enforcement both here and abroad as this was a national case. As a result, the main exploiter was arrested after many years of being hidden. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/28/tantric-yoga-guru-gregorian-bivolaru-charged-with-human-trafficking>

18. Several cases have involved residents who have been affected and the new structure has enabled cooperation and support for them, given them confidence to report and communicate with us and shown that as agencies we do take the issue seriously. Feedback from some residents:

*"The last 2 months have been very difficult, and I hope the notice will help put an end to the issue. I am very pleased with the outcome. We appreciate your time, hard work and most importantly your patience in dealing with us. You showed great understanding and empathy when working with us. We are very grateful for your & the teams support in dealing with the matter."*

### **Events and Community Engagement**

19. The city has organised and hosted events in the Town Hall for Anti-Slavery Day both in 2022 and 2023. Both have been well attended and the feedback has been positive. The event last year was particularly momentous as the theme was Lived Experience and we had five survivors of modern slavery speak about their experience and our guest speakers were HRH Princess Eugenie and Julia De Boinville of the Anti-Slavery Collective.

20. Community engagement is driven by the data we collect and the threat, risk and harm so are often more reactive. As a result, we developed and promoted 'weeks of action' which occur each quarter focussing on awareness raising, both for the public and those most vulnerable. These have included visiting Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) sites and developing and running a webinar for the care sector and visiting care workers.

21. We work with survivors within our communities who have benefited from our structure and support to monitor how our approach has helped them and consult with them on everything we plan around exploitation and modern slavery (e.g. development of new resources, community engagement etc).

22. Work with the local Police team on community engagement they are carrying out that aligns with our work.

## Achievements

23. The pathway and multi-agency protocol structure is working well. Agencies value this approach with following feedback received:

- *“Allows us to share intelligence and be preventative in our own work”.*
- *“Aids other organisations to potentially learn new information which can then be used to carry out more disruption activities”.*
- *“It is enabling us to safeguard individuals as well as consider geographic locations or thematic areas where there may be a deeper problem that needs to be looked in to”.*
- *“Interventions are quicker due to ASCO being able to pull together the relevant professionals to triangulate information and plan to safeguard those at risk and disrupt the perpetrators”.*
- *“The detailed risk assessments and pathways that have been developed help practitioners feel safe to share and use the agreed frameworks to support escalation of concerns”.*
- *“The level of sharing between the partnership leads to a deeper understanding of concerns within Oxfordshire and nationally, enabling organisations to ensure they are playing an active role in raising awareness and tackling the issues within their own remits”.*
- *“Oxfordshire is shown to be proactive and not just reactive in tackling modern slavery. Also evidences that collaboration and clear processes for communication between agencies and organisations is key”.*

24. Recognised nationally as good practice:

- Involved in working with the Local Government Association on their new Modern Slavery Guidance. Elements of Oxfordshire’s Pathway and Guidance Document were used in the publication and Oxford City acknowledged as a model of good practice that is recommended.
- Invited to be the keynote speaker at a national webinar around our work and requests by other local authorities to meet to share our good process and good practice.
- Invited to other local authorities to talk about Oxfordshire’s processes.

25. Sit on the Local Government Association Task group, Home Office First Responder's Forum, and the National Network Coordinators Forum.
26. Although we only deal with adults, we were instrumental in work with the Youth Justice and Exploitation Service in writing a bid for Oxfordshire to become a pilot site for Devolved NRM Decision Making for Children and the ASCO also sits on this panel as a decision maker.

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**Background Papers:** None

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