

Council

Monday 17 December 2018

Agenda Item 8 (a), Written Questions

Question From: Councillor Sean Woodcock

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Modern Slavery – Update on Motion to July Council

Question

In July this council passed a motion on Modern Slavery which contained 12 commitments. Can we be updated on where the Council is in terms of meeting them?

Beyond procurement; our council has a role to play in disrupting and detecting incidents of Modern Slavery taking place in our district. And services like housing, community safety, environmental health as well as licensing, benefits and council tax, are in a position to do just that.

What work has been or is being done to ensure that the whole council is fulfilling its duty in tackling this scourge?

Response

Cherwell District Council takes seriously its role in identifying incidents of modern slavery. Working with a wide range of sector partners and using its best endeavours it is committed to changing the lives of those enslaved and those profiting from enslavement and exploitation.

Staff have received a face to face briefing within the last 6 months regarding the signs of modern day slavery and an introduction to apps and websites; such as Safe car wash have been promoted for staff to use.

Awareness has been raised further through the staff newsletter. The induction of new staff includes a face to face briefing on safeguarding that includes modern day slavery and outlines the expectation that every employee concerns themselves with the exploitation of others. Safeguarding is everyone's business and the comprehensive training programme implemented last year covers the whole organisation, including Members. There is a members briefing for safeguarding on 7 February and will include Prevent – the anti-extremism and radicalisation programme as well as Modern Day slavery.

Officers with a regulatory role whether in Environmental Services, Community Safety, Housing, Planning or Licensing are confident in the role they can play in stopping exploitation through enforcement action and close working with police and social care services. Actions such as revoking licenses, establishing closure orders or partial closure orders, preventing trading from particular premises, have all been undertaken in the past bring the practise of Modern Day Slavery to a close and effect a change in the lives of those enslaved.

In direct response to the motion passed in July there has been work undertaken by the finance and procurement team to upskill staff and ensure greater rigour in ensuring compliance of all contractors.

Train its corporate procurement team to understand modern slavery through CIPS online course Ethical Procurement and Supply.

Those members of the team with CIPS Membership have taken the online ethics training offered from CIPS. We are also encouraging the use of similar training courses from LGA and CCS for those who do not have access to CIPS.

Require it’s contractors to comply fully with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, wherever it applies, with contract termination as a potential sanction for non-compliance.

Modern Slavery is covered within the Crown Commercial Service Standard Questionnaire (SQ) document, which we use for our tenders

Section 7	Modern Slavery Act 2015: Requirements under Modern Slavery Act 2015	
7.1	Are you a relevant commercial organisation as defined by section 54 ("Transparency in supply chains etc.") of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 ("the Act")?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
7.2	If you have answered yes to question 1 are you compliant with the annual reporting requirements contained within Section 54 of the Act 2015?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Please provide relevant the url ... No <input type="checkbox"/> Please provide an explanation

However, this question is not applicable to companies with under £36m turnover. Therefore, the team is developing its own additional question asking suppliers if they have their own Modern Slavery policy, with the option of agreeing to adopt the Council’s in the absence of their own.

In addition, Framework owners check that all policies, including those relating to ethics, are reviewed regularly during the lifetime of the framework. This includes any frameworks the Council has setup and managed itself. Contract management of frameworks will pick up Modern Slavery as part of the checklist of requirements being formulated by the Contract Monitoring Team.

The Procurement Team introduced Procurement and Contract Management training which covered Modern Slavery. All Assistant Directors and a selection of officers identified as contract managers across both councils were included.

Challenge any abnormally low-cost tenders to ensure they do not rely on the potential contractor practising modern slavery.

Abnormally low contracts, when received, are routinely challenged. To date, no queries of abnormally low tenders have indicated the possibility of Modern Slavery as the cause. This continues to be an area for challenge for low cost tenders.

Highlight to its suppliers that contracted workers are free to join a trade union and are not to be treated unfairly for belonging to one.

The team have undertaken a review of the standard tender templates in order to introduce a statement in support of this commitment. This will ensure that contracted workers are aware of this.

Require its tendered contractors to adopt a whistle-blowing policy which enables their staff to blow the whistle on any suspected examples of modern slavery

The template review includes adding a requirement for contractors to demonstrate their own whistle-blowing policy or to optionally adopt the Council's policy in the absence of their own.

Review its contractual spending regularly to identify any potential issues with MS

Regular contract and cost reviews, coordinated by the Contract Monitoring Team, monitor spend and highlight any causes for concern.

Highlight for its suppliers any risks identified concerning modern slavery and refer them to the relevant agencies to be addressed

The template review introduces the statement that the Council will contact the supplier if officers identify any risks to advise them to contact the relevant agencies.

Refer for investigation via NCA's national referral mechanism any of its contractors identified as a cause for concern regarding MS

The template introduces the statement that the Council will inform prospective suppliers that they will be reported to the NCA if officers identify a cause for concern.

In addition Procurement Officers have identified that there should be continuous management of contracts. Officers across the council are given an opportunity to understand the issues around MS. A tool to address this which is in discussion with HR colleagues, is the possibility of providing an e-learning module for all staff (e.g. <https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/courses/safeguarding-courses/human-trafficking>)

The safeguarding and whistle blowing policies are being updated to reflect the latest legislation and best practice. The safeguarding leads group are taking this work forward.