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13 October 2020

Mark Burns-Williamson
West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner
Ploughland House
62 George Street
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Dear Mark,

As Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, I am writing in connection with my statutory responsibility to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of modern slavery offences and the identification of victims.

I was pleased to see the announcement[1] in late 2019 regarding the significant government investment to provide Police and Crime Commissioners in eighteen areas across England and Wales with additional funding for two years to tackle violent crime. I understand that this funding is being used to bring together multi-agency partners including the police, local authorities, the health sector, community groups and third sector organisations to establish or build upon existing Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) in order to better understand what is driving violent crime and deliver co-ordinated initiatives that focus on prevention and early intervention.

As you will be aware, earlier this year I began working with Public Health England and other key stakeholders to explore a public health approach to modern slavery[2], therefore am supportive of examining the evidence base and thinking about the root causes of complex societal issues to inform the way that whole system approaches can be used to prevent harm.

Given the considerable overlap between modern slavery, exploitation and serious violence, I am keen to understand more about the strategic priorities and the intervention activity being delivered by the VRUs across England and Wales. Having reviewed the Violence Reduction Units in Focus report[3] recently published by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, I was interested to read about how the West Yorkshire VRU is supporting initiatives such as the Custody Diversion project involving a collaboration between the St Giles Trust, West Yorkshire Police and Liaison and Diversion.

I would therefore be grateful if you would be willing to share with my office a copy of your Problem Profile/Strategic Needs Assessment and Response Strategy as well as any updates regarding progress on delivery. April McCoig, the Victims and Partnerships lead within my office will be co-ordinating responses and can be contacted at April.McCoig@iasc.independent.gov.uk.

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[1] Home Office (2019) Funding for Violence Reduction Units announced
[2] Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2020) IASC Blog: A public health approach to modern slavery
[3] Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (2020) PCCs making a difference: Violence Reduction Units in focus

Finally, as you may be aware I have recently published two reviews which may be of interest to you in relation to modern slavery and exploitation. The first is a report of findings[4] from my call for evidence on use of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 Section 45 Statutory Defence which identified gaps in the safeguarding response for young people who had been criminally exploited. The second is a joint review produced in collaboration with ECPAT UK to identify what works in multi-agency decision making and the implications for child victims of trafficking[5] to inform the development of a pilot to trial devolved National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decision making for children.

I look forward to receiving your response. In the interests of transparency, I request that you respond in a way that enables me to publish your letter on my website.

Yours sincerely,

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

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[4] Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2020) The Modern Slavery Act (2015) Statutory Defence: A call for evidence
[5] Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and ECPAT UK (2020) A review of what works in multi-agency decision making and the implications for child victims of trafficking