National Referral Mechanism Pilot – Briefing Paper

In April 2014 the Home Secretary commissioned a thorough review of the NRM. The review reported on 11 November 2014 and recommended that the support system for identifying and supporting victims of people trafficking should be overhauled. The key recommendations in the report include:

- extending the NRM to cover all adult victims of modern slavery
- strengthening the First Responder role - the point when potential victims are first identified and referred by creating new Slavery Safeguarding Leads, supported by increased training and feedback
- establishing new multi-disciplinary panels, headed by an independent Chair, with a view to ceasing the sole decision-making roles of UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI and the UKHTC
- creating a single case working unit within the Home Office to replace the current case-working units in the National Crime Agency and UKVI

During July 2015 the Home Office, in consultation with civil society and operational delivery partners, launched a pilot to test these recommendations in two locations:

1.  West Yorkshire police force area

2.  The South West (Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire police force areas).

In order to enhance the role of local areas in the processes of identifying, referring and supporting potential victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, 2 new roles were established within the pilot:

- Slavery Safeguarding Leads (SSL) – A number of individuals from local statutory agencies will be identified as Slavery Safeguarding Leads in the pilot areas. They will accept referrals and then decide whether they believe the referred individual is a victim of modern slavery. SSLs will be the Competent Authorities responsible for the Reasonable Grounds decision in pilot areas.

- Regional multi-disciplinary panels ('the panel') – These panels will be comprised of a number of representatives from statutory agencies (Local Authorities, police, NHS, UK Visas and Immigration) and NGOs, and will be chaired by an individual appointed by the Home Office. The panels will make decisions on whether an individual is a confirmed victim of modern slavery. The Chairs of the panels will also be responsible for reviewing negative decisions made by other panels. Panels will be the Competent Authorities for the Conclusive Grounds decision in pilot areas.

This new process would be supported by a central Case Management Unit (CMU), to receive cases from SSLs, collect additional evidence to prepare a case file for

each referral and then coordinate the panel meetings where the Conclusive Grounds decisions will be made[1].

The pilot ran until March 2017 and conclusions showed that whilst reasonable ground decisions were taken quicker in the pilot areas compared to the non-pilot, there was little difference in the length of time to take conclusive ground decisions across the 2 areas. Practitioners felt that neither the SSL role nor membership of multi-disciplinary panels were sustainable beyond the pilot period. Both roles were voluntary, taken on in addition to existing responsibilities and this stretched the resources of those involved[2].

The reform of the NRM has very recently been announced. This will see decision making been taken by the Home office as a single point, a digital form to ease submissions and support for victims for a longer period and from initial contact with authorities. West Yorkshire have been asked to review the announcements and feedback any recommendations. West Yorkshire continue to see a rise in the submissions of NRM's.

---

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/475716/2015-10-30_SSL_guidance_v1_0.pdf

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653703/evaluation-national-referral-mechanism-pilot-horr94.pdf