

Would you recognise modern slavery?

Increasing awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking among taxi drivers across Hertfordshire was the aim of a training event yesterday (Tuesday January 15).

Representatives from all 10 taxi licencing authorities in the county attended the workshop about recognising people who are being trafficked or controlled by other people. This includes within drug trafficking networks, known as County Lines, as well as child sexual exploitation and extremism.

Licensing officers will then be able to raise awareness about these issues among taxi drivers. They will also be able to offer support to drivers who may be being exploited themselves. The event at Letchworth Library in Letchworth Garden City was hosted by the Hertfordshire Modern Slavery Partnership.

Sue Darker is Operations Director for Adults with Disabilities, Mental Health and Autism in Adult Care Service at Hertfordshire County Council and chair of the Partnership's steering group.

She said: "Hertfordshire is generally a safe place to live and work but exploitation, trafficking and slavery does exist here.

"Taxi drivers are often unwittingly used by criminals to move exploited people from location to location. They also see a broad cross-section of society through their work.

"As a result of this event, licensing officers will better train and support taxi drivers in recognising the signs of exploitation. They in turn will be able to report their concerns to authorities, so that those exploited people can be saved from a life of abuse and mistreatment."

New window stickers and air fresheners created by the Partnership that raise awareness of the signs of exploitation will soon be distributed to taxis and licenced premises in Hertfordshire.

Also speaking at the event were Hertfordshire Constabulary's Operation Tropic, Watford Borough Council's Licensing Department and the charity Unseen. Unseen will discuss how the national Modern Slavery Helpline that they run can provide information and support to victims and witnesses.

Anyone with concerns or who would like advice about modern slavery or human trafficking should call police via 101 or the national **Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700**. In an emergency call 999.

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Notes to editors:

Hertfordshire Modern Slavery Partnership is made up of more than 40 organisations including Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Constabulary, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Hertfordshire, the anti-trafficking charity Shiva Foundation, Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and the 10 district and borough councils in the county. It also features a wealth of other charities and law enforcement organisations. The Partnership's key areas of work include awareness raising, improving support for victims, creating better partnerships and training, and optimising the law enforcement response.

Modern Slavery is where someone's freedom is taken away in order to exploit or take advantage of them. Modern slavery affects men, women, girls and boys of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities. Criminals can use threats, violence, deception or debts to trap victims into slavery. Even if someone is being paid, it can still be exploitation.

Examples of modern slavery include:

- **Sexual exploitation**, such as being forced to have sex with people, maybe in return for gifts or money.
- **Forced labour**, where someone is made to work, often for little or no pay. Jobs or places of work could include construction, nail bars or car washes – but not only these.
- **Domestic servitude**, where someone is forced to perform household or childcare duties for little or no pay.
- **Criminal exploitation**, where someone is forced into criminal activity such as working in cannabis factories.

County Lines is the name given to describe drug dealing, which involves criminal networks from urban areas expanding their activities into smaller towns and rural areas. It often involves the exploitation of children, as gangs use young people and those with mental health or addiction problems to transport drugs and money. These gangs establish a base in the location they are targeting, often taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.

Dealers typically use a single phone line to facilitate the supply of Class A drugs to customers. The phone line is highly valuable and is protected through violence and intimidation.

For further information please contact Communication and Campaign Manager Dan Phillips on 01707 354588, or the on call press officer out of hours via the Force Control Room on 101.