



## **SIFA FIRESIDE BRIEFING:**

## **ADULT MODERN SLAVERY PATHWAY**

### **PREPARED BY**

Nicole Morris and  
Morgan Mead

**SIFA**  
fireside

**IN COLLABORATION WITH:**



**Birmingham**  
City Council



## SIFA Fireside – Adult Modern Slavery Pathway Briefing

In partnership with West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and Birmingham City Council.

### 1. Introduction

*“Housing and homelessness are central to modern slavery: all people who are exploited are put at risk of homelessness, and everyone who is homeless is at risk of exploitation.”*

*(Project TILL, 2021).*

SIFA Fireside is the central hub in Birmingham for homeless and vulnerably housed adults over the age of 25.

With a growing understanding of the relationship between homelessness and modern slavery and increasing numbers of exploitation concerns in their client base, SIFA Fireside embarked on several innovative pieces of work over 2021, including a new modern slavery working group in partnership with the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and Birmingham City Council.

The result of this collaboration was the creation of a new, robust pathway for homeless adults experiencing exploitation and the first modern slavery ‘front door’ in Birmingham for adults – leading the way in the city’s approach to modern slavery. The pathway is accompanied by a practical modern slavery casework toolkit for frontline caseworkers, a three-hour workshop to train all staff in the pathway and casework tools, and a free national template that can be adapted in other areas.

At the same time, SIFA was designing a new role in collaboration with West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network – an Anti-Slavery and Homelessness Development Officer, who now leads on the modern slavery pathway work and capacity building within SIFA.

Using this role, SIFA Fireside has successfully embedded their modern slavery work and seen a successful rollout of the pathway; training of all staff; ongoing capacity building; and the ability to undertake complex modern slavery casework. They have also done so without additional statutory funding, highlighting the crucial role of the third sector in advancing this work. It is hoped that statutory services will recognise the value of provision for adult survivors of modern slavery and their duties to safeguard and prevent re-trafficking, and fund accordingly in future.

This briefing gives an insight into the work so far, explores the impact on clients and staff, and makes key recommendations for the future of this agenda - both for Birmingham, and nationally.



## 2. Modern Slavery and Homelessness

*“The link between homelessness and modern slavery is undeniable.”*

*(The Clewer Initiative, 2021)*

Modern slavery and homelessness are inextricably linked. This has always been evidenced by the experience of frontline services (for example, The Passage in Westminster) but in recent years the evidence base has grown, strengthened by key reports.

One of the most recent and significant pieces of work has been the Crisis and Project TILI report ‘No Way Out and No Way Home’ (2021). This wide-ranging, data-driven project on the intersection between homelessness and modern slavery was the first of its kind – demonstrating clearly that housing and homelessness are absolutely central to modern slavery.

This report found that *two thirds* of survivors stayed in accommodation provided by their perpetrators during their exploitation, and a similar proportion were already homeless when they were recruited. It concluded that “all people who are exploited are put at risk of homelessness, and everyone who is homeless is at risk of exploitation”.

The modern slavery sector in the UK has also been calling for additional focus on the housing and homelessness sector for some time. The Clewer Initiative explains that “homeless people are at huge risk of being targeted by criminal gangs and also of being re-exploited. Victims often become homeless when they escape traffickers or if they leave government support – creating a vicious cycle of exploitation - escape - exploitation.” (2021).

Clewer also highlight that homeless people are “often targeted by traffickers when they are seeking out support at day centres, winter shelters, COVID hotels, soup runs, and food banks, as well as when they are living on the streets. Recruiters may offer work, money, accommodation, and sometimes alcohol or drugs. The promises turn out to be a lie.” (2021).

As early as 2013, the Salvation Army (who hold the Home Office contract for supporting potential survivors of modern slavery) was attempting to highlight the intersection of homelessness and modern slavery. They published a report showing that the majority of British nationals who became victims had been sleeping rough, and/or had mental health issues or learning difficulties, immediately prior to being trafficked. They also noted that the *number one* support need of trafficked people, once they had been identified to the authorities, was accommodation (Salvation Army, 2013).



Despite the warnings, these vulnerabilities and support needs have not been properly addressed in the intervening years. Stop the Traffik published analysis in 2020 demonstrating how the context of homelessness and insecure housing significantly increases the risk of exploitation.

People experiencing homelessness often have “multiple and complex, mostly unaddressed support needs”, and they have largely been “ignored by social support systems until their situations have deteriorated so severely that their lives have destabilised and they are left without a roof over their heads.” These vulnerability factors, combined with the landscape of emergency housing (including bedsits, night shelters, bedsits and temporary accommodation), and being surrounded by people with other complex support needs, can quickly exacerbate and escalate risk and abuse.

Stop the Traffik concluded that the “sad reality” in the UK is that “when people are left in dire need of money, with little to no opportunity to make it through conventional means and nowhere to live, there will *always* be exploitation.” (2020).

Despite this acknowledgement, the homelessness sector (both statutory and third sector) is often not adequately supported or resources to both identify exploitation, and navigate the complexities of a modern slavery case - including understanding someone’s rights and entitlements; being able to explain the National Referral Mechanism; recognising the intersection with immigration processes; or being able to explain the risks and benefits of reporting concerns to the police and the Home Office.

The Clewer Initiative explained that “it is common for volunteers and staff to wait until people say they are a victim, rather than proactively approach them. This is understandable - because it feels like a big deal to ask someone if they are being exploited or threatened” (2020). The Passage (2017) also identified that approximately 50% of frontline homelessness staff were unsure of the procedures when faced with a modern slavery case, and the same percentage had never referred someone to a specialist trafficking organisation for support.

The British Red Cross, among other organisations, have been emphasising for many years the vital importance of urgent, specialist interventions where there are concerns about exploitation, and the continuing lack of existing services that will provide this. In their evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into Modern Slavery (2018), they highlighted that a lack of legal and other support meant that survivors of trafficking were “often unable to make informed decisions” as to whether to access support, including exploring the National Referral Mechanism.

Against this backdrop, SIFA Fireside and their partners at the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and Birmingham City Council embarked on a long-term piece of work to address the critical need for embedding modern slavery awareness, practical support, and the capacity for specialist casework in the main homeless hub in Birmingham.





### 3. Developing the Modern Slavery Pathway at SIFA Fireside

*“Awareness is useful, but goes only so far if organisations do not have options for providing support to victims, particularly in order to help prevent re-trafficking.”*

*The Passage (2017)*

In January 2021, a working group was brought together consisting of staff from SIFA Fireside, West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network, and Birmingham City Council, including a local authority Housing Officer. The group mapped the existing processes for modern slavery cases who presented at the hub, and identified the key gaps in provision – most notably the lack of emergency accommodation where someone had no recourse to public funds, and the lack of immediate complex casework with a trafficking specialism.

They also identified patterns and repeating concerns – for example, survivors who had previously been entered into the NRM but never been supported to access their entitlements, or those who had been re-trafficked following a lack of safeguarding at identification point.

To address these gaps, the group developed the following tools:

- A detailed [modern slavery pathway](#) for SIFA Fireside, identifying the key steps taken by each job role; the partners available for support; and the resources to support each step.
- A [pre-NRM casework toolkit](#), allowing caseworkers to download the specific pages to help with modern slavery casework.
- A shared resource drive to accompany the pathway, including template emails, key contact lists, and template letters (including for NRM reconsiderations).

These tools were then sanitized for national use and can be accessed here:

- [Adult Modern Slavery Pathway: Template for National Use](#)
- [Modern Slavery: Adult Pre-NRM Casework Toolkit](#)

It has also been extremely positive to see these tools start to be adapted and implemented at other hubs in Birmingham, including the St Basils Youth Hub for 16-25s, which has just started training all staff in use of their adapted modern slavery pathway.



#### 4. Anti-Slavery and Homelessness Development Officer

*“Survivors themselves emphasized the need for specialist advocacy and ongoing casework support...[to]... negotiate the bureaucracy and sometimes lack of skilled or informed staff of other statutory agencies and services”*

*(British Red Cross, 2019)*

The Anti-Slavery and Homelessness Development Officer is a unique role that is based with SIFA Fireside and the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network on a two-year secondment. This was developed in recognition that a response to modern slavery has to include specialist casework, and that embedding knowledge of modern slavery was crucial to homelessness services. The primary purpose of the role was to help build the capacity of teams to provide a best practice model of support to individuals who had experienced modern slavery.

The role aims to support staff in the early identification of people who may have been exploited; builds the skills and expertise of third sector caseworkers and Housing Officers at the SIFA Fireside homeless hub through a series of training packages; and strengthen the collaborative working between voluntary sector and statutory agencies at strategic level.

The below activities are three examples of how this role takes a capacity-building approach:

- a) Delivering a repeat 3hour workshop designed to train staff in the modern slavery pathway and its implementation. This workshop covers a general awareness of modern slavery and includes case studies that support staff to work through the pathway and toolkit. Since August 2021, workshops have been delivered to all staff at SIFA Fireside, including non-frontline roles such as comms and fundraising, and the co-located Housing Officers.
- b) A 6-hour Modern Slavery Champions training package is offered to staff and volunteers who are particularly interested in advising and guiding their colleagues using their knowledge and expertise. The package consists of three separate sessions which cover an introduction to modern slavery, exploring the national referral mechanism in-depth, and working with survivors in a person-centred and trauma-informed way. This is adapted from the Birmingham City Council Modern Slavery Champions training package which is concurrently being rolled out throughout the local authority.
- c) Prevention workshops have been designed to sit alongside the job club each week in the drop-in centre, offering group and 1-1 sessions for an hour. These sessions explore exploitation, employment rights and good work tips. The prevention workshops are meant to be fun, informal, and offer a variety of media and quiz's as well as group discussion around what modern slavery and human trafficking are and how clients themselves can spot the signs of potentially exploitative work.



Since developing the Anti-Slavery and Development Officer role at Sifa Fireside in July 2021, the role itself has had a significant impact on staff on the frontline staff, and on the clients who present at the homelessness drop-in. The table below shows the nine cases between July and December 2021 where potential exploitation was identified at SIFA Fireside and addressed through the modern slavery pathway.

When looking at the cases, it's also important to note that the NRM, while often presented as the only option for potential survivors, was not always the outcome. This highlights how the NRM may be just one of multiple options for a survivor of exploitation, and that referral in should be based on informed consent and choice, with person-centred casework practice that considers the holistic needs and particular circumstances of each individual adult.

Type of Exploitation	Nationality	Outcome
Forced Labour (scrap metal industry)	British (two survivors)	Rehoused out of the area in a long-term council tenancy, arranged through commissioned housing via SIFA Fireside and Birmingham City Council. Referred into the NRM and receiving outreach support.
Financial Exploitation (within supported accommodation)	British	Rehoused in long term, supported housing, through SIFA Fireside.
Financial Exploitation	Polish	Referred into the National Referral Mechanism and received pre-reasonable Grounds emergency accommodation and support.
Post NRM	Latvian	Supported through Adult Social Care
Forced Labour (Hospitality)	Indian with EU entitlements	Received supported accommodation through SIFA Fireside.
Forced Labour / Criminal Exploitation (Cannabis Cultivation)	Albanian	Reported as a missing person.
Human Trafficking and Criminal Exploitation (Cannabis Cultivation)	Vietnamese	Under 25, signposted to St Basils.
Human Trafficking and Forced Labour / Criminal exploitation (Cannabis Cultivation)	Vietnamese	Referred into the National Referral Mechanism and received a positive Reasonable Grounds decision.



## 5. Case Study

Two British nationals presented at SIFA Fireside for emergency assistance. They had been targeted for labour exploitation while in temporary accommodation and identified that they were unsafe in some specific areas due to experiences of abuse and violence over a prolonged period. They were currently bidding on properties together in Birmingham and expressed a clear wish to remain together for mutual support.

The police had initially removed them from the temporary accommodation and took them to an emergency hostel, instructing them to present at SIFA Fireside the next day for housing assistance. No questions were asked regarding the potential modern slavery, and no statements were taken at that point.

When both clients then presented at SIFA, they were initially provided with emergency housing through Birmingham City Council as per the modern slavery pathway. This was designed as a temporary measure while casework could take place at SIFA to identify their options. However, within 24 hours, they were spotted by their alleged traffickers and felt they were no longer safe in any area of Birmingham.

Both clients presented back at SIFA the next day, and following the modern slavery pathway, a joint assessment was undertaken by SIFA and a BCC Housing Officer.

Conducting this joint assessment and following the modern slavery pathway meant that SIFA Fireside could undertake complex casework with the support of the Anti-Slavery and Homelessness Development Officer, while the BCC Housing Officer could explore appropriate housing options as per the needs of the clients. SIFA supported the clients to understand their options, rights and entitlements as potential survivors of exploitation, and sought legal advice around the specific benefits that the NRM would give the two clients if they chose to be referred.

As a temporary measure, both clients were housed for two nights in a hotel outside Birmingham via the Rough Sleepers Initiative fund. They then were rehoused in self-contained flat via a commissioned provider out of Birmingham, providing them with a long-term tenancy. As per their assessment and identified support needs, additional services were then placed around them with consent, including Adult Social Care, drug and alcohol support and NRM outreach support.

SIFA Fireside delivered new bedding, clothing, food, food bank vouchers and new appliances to them both. They also liaised with West Midlands Police to arrange ABE interviews as the clients wished to engage with a police investigation.

Both clients are now in the process of being supported to receive their belongings from their previous accommodation, as it is unsafe for them to return to. Both have received positive reasonable grounds decisions from the Single Competent Authority following NRM referrals, and are now working with their NRM outreach worker to try and ensure they receive official recognition as survivors of modern slavery.





## 6. Impact Statements

*“Our vision for our Anti-Slavery and homelessness programme has been to ensure that identifying exploitation is everyone’s business. Since the project started our staff have significantly increased their understanding of modern slavery. We have developed a housing pathway with our co-located housing options team and have created modern slavery champions. Already we have seen more people being identified, quicker routes into appropriate services and tailored support offered that meets the unique needs of those who’ve experienced homelessness and exploitation”.* **(Carly Jones - Chief Executive, SIFA Fireside)**

*“Since being at Sifa, I have worked on a couple of modern slavery cases. I am beginning to realise now the impact this has on potential victims, the trauma they must work thorough and how a holistic approach is crucial in supporting them. I am in awe at the work of the team at West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and recognise some of the daily challenges that must be overcome to protect survivors. Bravo!”* **(Senior Housing Solutions & Support Caseworker - Birmingham City Council)**

*“This work is proving instrumental in the early identification of vulnerable persons, providing them with an immediate safeguarding response such as the above case. They were immediately safeguarded through excellent partnership work with the local authority, whilst also ensuring that a Slavery Adult Safeguarding Case Conference referral facilitated multi-agency oversight of a multifaceted plan to prevent their further exploitation”.* **(Nick Walton - Victim Safeguarding Pathways Coordinator)**

*“Case law has been clear that the statutory duty to safeguard and prevent re-trafficking begins even before an NRM referral, but Home Office guidance has never made it clear which department this sits in, and there is no funding or resource available nationally for this work. As a result, many local authorities end up in extremely high-risk situations when faced with an adult survivor who needs immediate support. The complexity of this work and the intersection with other areas of policy (e.g. immigration law and the No Recourse to Public Funds policy) mean that these cases are often left to the third sector to try and deal with, or survivors go without the crucial safeguarding and input that they are entitled to. Developing this pathway at SIFA, and it being strengthened by the capacity-building and complex input from the Development Officer, has been a huge step forward in creating a ‘front door’ for modern slavery cases in Birmingham. I really look forward to the further development of this work, and seeing this approach being adopted in other hubs in Birmingham and across the country.”* **(Morgan Mead, Modern Slavery Coordinator – Birmingham City Council).**



*“I have been hugely impressed with the energy and professionalism that the Anti-Slavery and Homelessness Development Officer has brought to the role. The added value is without question! She is readily identifying cases of exploitation and is ensuring that appropriate safeguarding measures are implemented, whilst also seeing and implementing preventative measures as appropriate”.* (Nick Walton – Victim Safeguarding Pathways Coordinator, West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network).

*“Based on our close working relationship with Carly and SIFA Fireside, and our recognition that exploitation and homelessness are intrinsically linked, we applied for funding for a post that sits across both organisations. Nicole Morris was successful in applying for the post and her knowledge of human trafficking, homelessness, partnership working and passion for the role and subject meant she was absolutely the right person for the role. Her work on raising awareness, training and victim care pathways has made a significant difference in the West Midlands. Nicole has far exceeded our expectations in the short time she has been in post and look forward to working with her in 2022”.* (Robin Brierley, Executive Director- West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network)



## 7. Recommendations and suggestions

Following the development and piloting of this piece of work, SIFA Fireside has identified some initial recommendations for further work in this area:

1. **Circulating the national pathway template.** This has been produced as a template so that other services, regions, and support hubs have the opportunity to explore a similar approach within their own organisations. SIFA Fireside would encourage other areas to look at adopting a similar model and ensuring that survivors can be appropriately safeguarded regardless of their city, and not contingent on their recourse to public funds. All feedback and suggested updates to the pathway are very welcomed.
2. **Replicating this work in all Birmingham Hubs.** It is recommended that each 'hub' in Birmingham embeds the modern slavery pathway within their work, and that they look to create capacity through having a specialist modern slavery and housing worker to support this work. This would ensure each hub has a point of contact who can lead and escalate complex cases effectively, whilst promoting efficient partnership working.
3. **Modern Slavery and RSI Funding.** All future Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) funding proposals should include the provision of modern slavery support and up to 10 days of pre-NRM emergency accommodation. Many homeless survivors present with no recourse to public funds, and without immediate support they remain at risk of re-trafficking and further abuse.
4. **Safe and appropriate emergency accommodation.** Emergency accommodation provided in the pre-NRM space should be safe and appropriate to ensure that survivors can engage with support while ensuring their basic needs are met, including casework, legal advice, and destitution support if needed. This should follow the [recommendations](#) made for the government's long-awaited pre-NRM Places of Safety provision.
5. **Embedding modern slavery in homelessness work.** Modern slavery training for staff and volunteers in frontline homelessness services is absolutely key. This should include embedding the modern slavery chapter of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, ensuring that modern slavery and abuse factors are taken into account during housing assessments with the provision of appropriate, safe housing for survivors as a baseline standard. Preventative activities, such as workshops on workers' rights, and multi-language information and posters on seeking support for exploitation, should also sit alongside.



## 8. Accessing our work

1. **SIFA Adult Modern Slavery Pathway**
2. **Adult Modern Slavery Pathway: Template for National Use**
3. **Modern Slavery: Adult Pre-NRM Casework Toolkit**
4. **NRM Explanatory Booklets - West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network** (previously developed through OPCC funding)

## 9. References

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