INTERVIEW WITH DETECTIVE CHIEF INSPECTOR SION HALL: APRIL 20 2015

Responsibilities

I cover East Division (East Lancs) and am the lead for the following areas of business within the Division:

- Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery
- Child Sexual Exploitation - Engage Team
- Serious and Organised Crime
- Intelligence Unit
- Dwelling Burglary

A significant proportion of my time is involved with the challenges of Human trafficking and CSE. Within East we have the two specialist, multi-agency teams who work predominantly on these areas, however, it is important to ensure that the 24/7 uniform patrols have a good understanding of the many aspects of these crimes so they can identify potential victims whilst dealing with all sorts of everyday incidents.

The Intelligence Unit and the Organised crime team play an important part in pulling together various strands of information and where appropriate targeting known and suspected offenders. This targeting may be through overt activity (e.g. executing warrants, conducting visits etc) or in some cases through covert activity (e.g. Surveillance etc).

Geographical Areas of Concern

East Lancs is a very diverse area and I think we cannot be complacent that things won’t be happening in any part of the Division, however, the main areas are obviously the more populated ones – Burnley, Blackburn, Pendle (Nelson / Brierfield). Cheap rented housing and large companies offering work to low/unskilled is attractive to many genuine migrant workers, however, this also provides opportunity for the unscrupulous to exploit people.

Nature of Concerns

Exploitation is very much on a sliding scale from domestic servitude to complete control over the victim’s life. It is important to understand that control over vulnerable victims need not just be physical restraint. Withholding passports and identity documents, implied threats and isolation from support networks (i.e. Family & friends) all work towards controlling the movement and freedom of victims.

Significant numbers of people across the UK are exploited through forced labour or used in the sex industry to earn the abusers vast sums of money whilst degrading and mistreating our fellow human beings.
Organised Crime

Due to the potential to make vast sums of money, Trafficking has attracted the attention of many Organised Crime Groups (OCG). We are currently working to identify ‘Hotspot’ areas of business that tends to attract Traffickers and whilst the opportunities are almost endless, some of the specific areas of concern are around low paid and unskilled work. Organised Crime Groups may use (largely) cash only businesses such as takeaways and car washes to employ trafficked labour but they also use them to launder large sums of cash from illegal drug dealing activities and prostitution. OCGs rarely confine themselves to just one area of criminality and so we often see that groups involved in exploitation may well also be involved in drugs, money laundering and violence – much of which reinforces the control over the victims.

Operation Proteus

Proteus is an overarching name for the activity that is going on within East Lancs. There will obviously be many and varied targeted operations around specific individuals and problems but Proteus is the catchall for Trafficking activity by the Police in East Lancashire.

Examples of Trafficking: Disruption rather than prosecution

The press has reported instances of slavery or trafficking in Blackburn and Burnley with others not too far away in Preston, Chorley, Bolton and Rochdale. These cover domestic servitude, enforced labour, forced marriage and prostitution but all too often the threshold of evidence is not reached. More often than not we have to be content with convictions for lesser offences or disruption of activities. Some local examples are below.

Some individuals were trafficked into UK with the promise of work, however when they arrived, they were then forced into shop lifting to cover their expenses of travel and accommodation. This debt was enforced through threats of violence aimed at the victims and their families. It was really difficult to prosecute because the victims were too frightened. We offered support and managed to facilitate their return to their homeland and the support of their families. The offenders were never prosecuted for this offence, however, once we became aware of them we were able to target and disrupt them in an effort to ensure they do not do the same to others.

An ongoing case is where somebody alerted the Police about a vulnerable man working in a garage who turned out to be trapped and abused, and living on the premises. He is a UK citizen who is extremely vulnerable due to his mental state. By working with other agencies; he has now moved elsewhere and has been supported and safeguarded. Hopefully he will start a new life. This is trafficking and forced labour, with threats of violence. Again a prosecution was difficult but the man is now safe and the perpetrator is being targeted to ensure the same thing won’t happen again.
Another case involved an arranged but not enforced marriage. The victim outlined a life of control and misery. She told us that from the moment she arrived in the UK she was locked in a room for a while, treated like a slave, treated badly by all of the occupants of the house (up to ten people), humiliated in front of the family and systematically raped by her husband. Although she was allowed out of the house to go shopping and do chores, her movements and time away was monitored and controlled. She eventually ran away. This case highlights the differences in offending as the case she outlines falls within the definition of domestic servitude, rather than trafficking because she came of her own free will. Unfortunately due to evidential matters, the case did not make the threshold for prosecution, however, she is now out of that scenario and she is building a new life.

Some key points

- It isn’t an epidemic in East Lancashire but it is happening here
- It happens mainly in the populated areas but don’t be complacent
- Exploitation and slavery involving enforced labour, the sex industry and organised thefts have all happened in East Lancs.
- Hot spots include around takeaways, nail bars, car washes - cash intensive business which can be used for both trafficking and money laundering
- What happens nationally and internationally is being played out locally
- Information and Intelligence are key to identifying both victims and offenders
- It’s a multi-agency task – this is not just a police problem, it is a social justice issue
- The signs are there for people to spot them
- Modern day slavery is more subtle than thinking of an image of a man chained up in a shed
- People are being exploited even as you read this; many victims don’t realise they are victims and many others don’t know how to reach out for help
- Victims rarely have the confidence to report
- There is organised crime around drugs and prostitution and trafficking
- It’s about safeguarding - proactive rather than reactive
- There is more trafficking than convictions, convictions are difficult because of victim reluctance and getting to the traffickers themselves
- Prosecutions may be difficult but disruption is effective and should be regarded as a positive outcome. Every person should be allowed to live freely and without fear or exploitation
What can the public do to help?

As I have already outlined, this is often a hidden crime where even the victims are reluctant to complain. I would ask that the public help by spreading awareness of the issues and being vigilant to the signs of exploitation, some of which are outlined below –

- Unable to leave their work environment.
- Show signs that their movements are being controlled
- Show signs of fear or anxiety
- Be subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or their family
- Be distrustful of the Authorities
- Not in possession of their passport or other important documents
- Not know the address of their home or work
- Receive little or no payment
- Work excessive hours with no days off
- Have limited or no social interaction

If you have any concerns, please report these concerns to the Police or other agency

Remember, somebody’s life may depend on it!

DCI Sion Hall
11 May 2015