Update on Lancashire Constabulary, East Lancashire Division

Despite serious cuts in Lancashire, DCI Sion Hall has managed to create a strong specialist trafficking team in East Division. He hopes that that western and southern divisions will adopt the model. Sion’s team comprises:

- Detective Chief Inspector Sion Hall who has the lead on trafficking and CSE and he also has responsibility for organised crime amongst other things
- Detective Inspector who also has other responsibilities
- Detective Sergeant
- 3 Detective Constables on covert duties and investigations
- PC Tom Sanford is doing a training programme with all our frontline staff and is forging links with other Agencies and the public.
- PC Mark Blackey joins us on the 1st August to work closely with Tom.
- There is also a full time specialist on phones and media but the post is not permanent.

This specialist unit is not yet on the formal staffing structure but hopefully will be made so.

Update on current cases

Sion referred to three cases of sexual exploitation which are currently being pursued and a fourth was reported in the news last week. There have also been two cases of forced labour one of which has been reported in the news recently – a man working in a newsagent’s shop in Blackburn. It is clear that with a dedicated team and the greater intelligence potential from well informed police officers, public services and the public generally, a great deal more can be achieved.

Visit to Romania

In Romania Sion linked with a Friendship Group which is half UK and half Romanian. The UK arm is run by Brian, a retired vicar at Hesketh Bank. The Romanian arm is Puiu, a pastor who runs enterprises for trafficking victims in two or three settings. He is Romanian but speaks English and works with the Police organised crime teams. Sion looked at a couple of settings, one of which was a farm where the rescued victims could work and help victims to get back to a normal life with a feeling of self worth. Social enterprises like this can pay slightly above the average wage. One of them makes soap and has a contract with hotels. The enterprises might even make a profit.

Sion went to Arad, a city near the Hungarian border and other Roma villages where the poverty was tangible with unmade roads. Villages like these are where a lot of victims are coming from. Sion was also taken to a village where the organised crime families live in vulgar wealth - a lot of it gained from human trafficking.

A strong link has been established with the Romanian Police who are working hard from their end and welcome the collaboration with East Lancashire. Joint intelligence and collaboration means that perpetrators’ movements can be monitored and it is easier to gather evidence. It is evident that some of the girls travel from Romania to the UK in cars.

Currently in the UK, victims rescued from trafficking can stay but Brexit may threaten this. A trafficking victim can more easily attain refugee status than other asylum seekers. Some want to go home anyway and the Police will assist but some have been sold by their family out of poverty, and are vulnerable to being trafficked again and end up back over here doing the same thing.

The next step is to bring a couple of Romanian Police from their organised crime team over here to cement the relationship. Funding for this trip is being supported by the PCCs office.

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