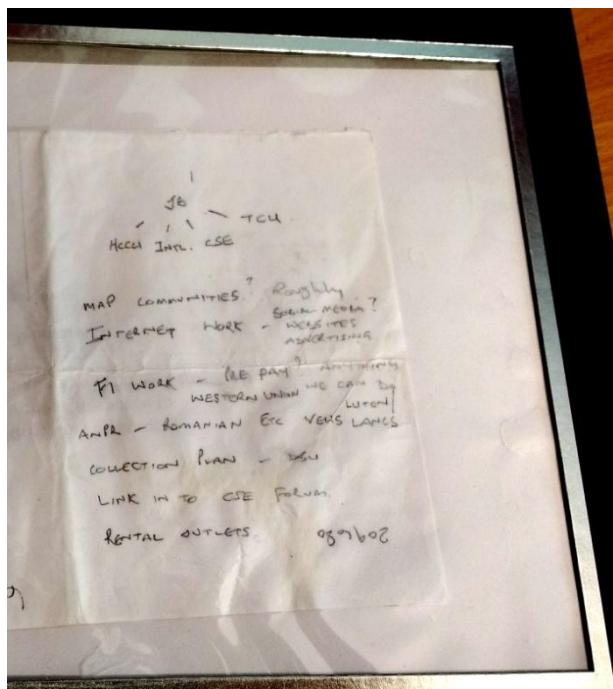


August 7, 2017: Meeting with DCI Mark Vaughton

On Monday 7 August we met DCI Mark Vaughton who has taken over from Sion Hall on retirement. We were struck by Mark's enthusiasm and commitment to the job and flattered that he clearly valued the awareness raising work we have been doing over the last three years. The Police are in no doubt that what they need in the fight against human trafficking is more public awareness and more referrals from the public.

On the wall, in a frame, was the back of the envelope on which Sion and Mark had scribbled down their initial thoughts on a future dedicated trafficking operation. At the time they were travelling back from a European conference and inspired to do something. It hung there in testimony to how Mark's dedicated team of seven had grown from such small beginnings.



Like Sion, Mark's focus is on the victim and success is measured not so much by successful prosecution but by victim safeguarding. Trafficking convictions are notoriously difficult to achieve and if victims are safeguarded then deportation, conviction for lesser offences, and disruption of criminal operations all have to be counted as successes.

Mark updated us on thirteen cases they had handled in the last 18 months. Two of these were very significant.

Operation Nyx was a successful prosecution and perhaps the first victimless prosecution for a trafficking offence in the UK. It centred on a pop up brothel in Accrington Road, Blackburn in May 2016. The Lancashire Telegraph reported on the case on May 12

http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/14489518.Three_arrested_after_human_trafficking_raid_in_Blackburn/?ref=mrb&lp=9 A much more detailed account appears in a paper by our Sion Hall and by Miheala Tomita and Adina Schwartz of West University of Timisoara, Romania. [The report, Social Protection of the Human Trafficking Victims from Romania](#) is worth reading and analyses the current social assistance context in Romania and includes the unique case study provided by Sion. Three men were convicted and sentenced to jail, the significance of this being the success of achieving a success at all, and this one without victim testimony. Sion's input to the report details how that success was achieved.

Operation Ludlow was the culmination of months of work with Romania and Europol which resulted in the arrest of eight people. A number of towns and counties were involved in a Romanian organised crime group centred on Blackburn. This was no doubt the greatest achievement of East Lancashire Police's trafficking team and the Lancashire Telegraph report can be found at

http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/15232621.Dawn_raids_uncover_highly_organised_gangs_were_exploiting_women_and_girls_to_make_up_to_1_3m_from_human_trafficking/

Just how long it takes to bring cases to the courts, and how difficult it is to get convictions can be seen from where we are with the thirteen cases Mark updated us on:

- In one case there were convictions
- In 5 cases the perpetrators are awaiting trial
- In 5 cases the perpetrators were released without charge
- In one more it is likely there will be no charge
- One case resulted in deportation
- One case is ongoing

A case from 2015 which predates these is a good example of one particular type of victim and the difficulties of getting a trafficking prosecution. This was of a woman where Mark had no doubt that she was a victim but after rescue she was repatriated and there was never any hope she would testify. In fact she did not regard herself as a victim though the invisible bonds that held her were clear enough. She had a husband and two children (one disabled) back in Romania and had come to the UK to work as a prostitute. She said she worked from 9.00 am to 2.00 am during which period she would typically make £600 at £60 per hour. For seven days a week she netted an enormous amount but received only a pittance to live on and send back to her family. Photographs of her smiling and holding large quantities of money didn't help a prosecution for trafficking and the perpetrator was jailed for 4 years for the lesser offence of living off immoral earnings. He had similar convictions in Suffolk and Ipswich. Public and juries don't have a lot of sympathy for cases like this, yet these women are victims. Mark says, as Sion did before him, it isn't right and they deserve to be treated with the same respect as anybody else.

There were other cases beyond the thirteen Mark listed. They started as potential trafficking cases but probably amounted to serious exploitation and breach of labour laws, thus falling short of the more serious offence. One car wash had been fined £20,000 and was back in operation..

We touched on labour exploitation in the catering industry following a local case of East Europeans working long hours below the minimum wage. This is being reviewed by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). It was a case where Mark's team had been involved over safeguarding issues and I mentioned that I had spoken to the local Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) man about it when he was in a Blackpool hotel dealing with a case that was potentially a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral. There will be a week of activity later in the year involving the Police, Immigration, HMRC and GLAA and this may focus on catering establishments. If so, it will be looking at the pay and conditions of workers in the knowledge that disreputable agencies provide foreign workers who are then exploited. It would be helpful to know in advance of any catering establishments, that employ foreign labour, including the most up market ones. Mostly of course, they are above board but to the casual eye it is not easy to distinguish when something is OK from when it is not.

We also spoke briefly about Donna Worthington's play on slavery, Blackbirds at Dawn, in Lancaster on September 15 and 16. See <http://www.olotv.org.uk/parish-groups/trafficking/work-olotv-parish-group> for details.

We also updated Mark on the Lee House Human Trafficking Exhibition which is in its final stage of development and just needs some large graphics to illustrate different forms of slavery. Mark agreed to furnish us with pictures taken inside pop-up brothels.

Anthony Brown
11 August 2017