

MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT

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Wards affected: All.

PROPOSED DECISION

To note this report and support the principle of publication of a voluntary Statement.

Reason for Decision

Preparation and publication of a voluntary Statement will evidence that the Council takes seriously its role in preventing modern slavery, and has put in place robust steps to prevent it.

Corporate Implications

1. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 came into force on 26 March 2015 and is aimed at preventing slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking, protecting victims, and it sets up an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. A key provision in Section 54 places larger commercial organisations under a duty to publish a “slavery and human trafficking statement” (referred to in this report as the Statement) for each financial year of its organisation. Larger commercial organisations are defined as those who have a turnover in excess of £36 million. These Statements set out the steps the organisation has taken during the financial year to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in any of its supply chains and in any part of its own business, or that it has not taken any such steps.
2. Although this statutory duty does not apply to the Council, and this has been confirmed by the Anti-Slavery Commissioner’s Office, the nature of the Council’s business makes it good practice to publish a voluntary Statement to show that it is serious about playing an important role in preventing slavery servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking.

Executive Summary

This report sets out the reasoning for publishing a voluntary Statement setting out the steps the Council takes to seek to prevent slavery and human trafficking being involved in its supply chains and invites the support of the Standards Committee.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities – Implications

Publication of a voluntary statement helps support the Council’s Corporate Plan, particularly its Cohesive Communities priority and its commitment to good governance as set out therein.

Background and Issues

As set out above, the Modern Slavery Act places a duty on larger commercial organisations to publish annual Statements setting out what if any steps have been taken to seek to prevent slavery and human trafficking.

The legislation provides that Statements can include information about:

- The organisation's structure, its business and its supply chains;
- Its policies in relation to slavery and human trafficking;
- Its due diligence processes in relation to slavery and human trafficking and its business and supply chains;
- The part of its business and supply chains where there is a risk of slavery and human trafficking taking place and the steps it has taken to assess and manage that risk;
- Its effectiveness in ensuring that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in its business or supply chains, measured against such performance indicators as it considers appropriate;
- The training about slavery and human trafficking available to its staff.

In September, the Corporate Governance Group, which is made up of senior officers, considered the issue of a voluntary Statement, and concluded that whilst only one other local authority is known at this stage to have voluntarily published such a statement (East Lindsey DC) it would be good practice to do so, as the Council has a number of ways in which it actively seeks to ensure such preventative work is in place, and that drawing together the steps taken in order to prepare a Statement would be a relatively straightforward process, and would provide evidence of the Council's commitment in this area.

Work is therefore ongoing to prepare the Statement for publication, and it is currently in draft. Key areas involved will include steps taken in relation to procurement, HR, fraud prevention and partnership work done by the Communities and Environment teams.

Whilst the Standards Committee's terms of reference do not require it to formally authorise the publication of such a statement, its support as the Committee with general responsibility for standards of conduct will clearly underpin the Council's strong corporate commitment to eradicating slavery and trafficking. The statement, which is currently in draft, can be circulated to Committee members for observations prior to publication if so desired.

Options

There is an option not to publish a voluntary statement. However, this would miss an opportunity to publicly demonstrate the Council's firm commitment to eradicating slavery and human trafficking.

Conclusions

Preparation and publication of the Statement will evidence that the Council takes seriously its role in preventing modern slavery, and has put in place robust steps to prevent it.

Next Steps

The statement will be finalised and published, and updated annually including any further steps taken.

Background Papers

None.