

# SANDWELL ANTI-SLAVERY NEWSLETTER

Shining a Beacon of Hope and Unity Against Modern Slavery

As we move forward in our enduring battle against modern slavery, this issue of our newsletter brings you the latest updates, inspiring stories, and key insights from Sandwell's frontline. Our collective efforts continue to make significant strides in safeguarding our community and bringing hope to those affected by these heinous crimes.

In This Issue:

- **Major Legal Victory in Smethwick:** A closer look at the recent landmark case where justice was served against perpetrators of modern slavery.
- **Training and Development:** A sneak peek into our comprehensive training plan for 2024, designed to empower and educate.
- **SHOP's Success Story:** Reflecting on a recent case referral that led to a significant breakthrough.
- **Looking Forward:** Previewing our upcoming initiatives and projects in the year ahead.
- **Community Voices:** Featuring testimonials and stories from survivors and those on the front lines of this fight.
- **Spotlight on Strategy:** An overview of our strategic achievements and future goals.

Our Unwavering Commitment As we continue to face the challenges of modern slavery, our commitment remains stronger than ever. This issue not only shares our successes and plans but also serves as a reminder of the importance of community involvement and vigilance. Join us in our mission to create a world free from exploitation and slavery.

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# Review of Modern Slavery Cases

As we approach the end of the year, it's important to reflect on the efforts made by SHOP in tackling modern slavery in Sandwell. In 2023, SHOP received a total of 201 referrals, indicative of our community's vigilance and commitment to combating this issue.

## Monthly Overview:

- The highest number of cases was reported in November (27 cases), followed by August (23) and January (21).
- This trend shows an increased awareness and reporting of modern slavery incidents throughout the year.

## Case Status Distribution:

- The majority of cases involved multi-agency visits, with 116 instances, demonstrating the effective collaboration between different agencies.
- Single agency interventions accounted for 39 cases, highlighting targeted responses to specific incidents.


## Top Referral Sources:

- The Police were the leading source of referrals with 53 cases, underscoring their crucial role in identifying potential victims. Private sector housing also played a significant role, contributing 24 referrals.

## Regional Focus:

- West Bromwich reported the highest number of cases (59), followed by Smethwick (48) and Oldbury (34).
- The wards most affected were Soho and Victoria, West Bromwich Central, and Smethwick.

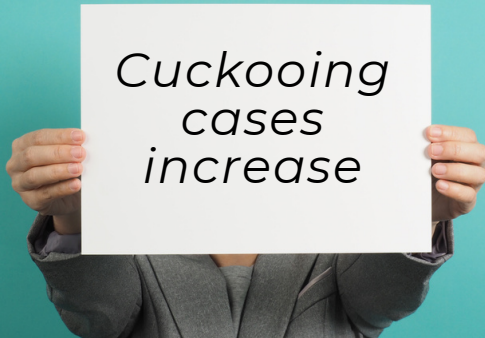
The data from 2023 reinforces the need for continued vigilance and collaboration across all sectors of our community. The diversity of referral sources and the breadth of areas affected highlight that modern slavery is a pervasive issue, requiring our united efforts.



## *Rise in care agency cases*

In 2023, we've observed a notable increase in modern slavery cases linked to care agencies within Sandwell. This year, 17 cases were reported, compared to just 3 in previous years, marking a significant rise. This trend highlights the growing complexities in the care sector, where vulnerable individuals may be at risk of exploitation. It underscores the urgent need for heightened vigilance and robust safeguarding measures in care environments. As we move forward, it's crucial that our response evolves to effectively address these emerging challenges, ensuring the protection and support of those most vulnerable in our society.

In 2023, a significant surge in cuckooing cases has been recorded, with 27 incidents identified, a substantial increase from the 3 cases noted in previous years. Cuckooing, which involves criminals exploiting vulnerable individuals by taking over their homes for illegal activities, poses a growing concern in our community. This alarming trend highlights the need for increased awareness and intervention strategies to combat this form of modern slavery. It calls for collaborative efforts among law enforcement, social services, and the community to identify and support victims, disrupt criminal activities, and safeguard our neighbourhoods from such exploitation.



## *Cuckooing cases increase*



## *Organised Immigration Crime*

2023 has seen a noteworthy shift in the landscape of organised immigration crime related to modern slavery, with 60 cases reported in our region. Although this represents a decrease from the 90 cases in previous years, it remains a significant concern. This form of crime often involves complex networks that exploit individuals for labour, criminal activities, or trafficking. The persistence of these cases underscores the necessity for a robust, multi-faceted approach that includes stringent law enforcement, comprehensive support systems for victims, and international cooperation to dismantle these networks and protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation.





**TRAINING**

**IMPACT**

# TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

**A TOTAL OF 72 TRAINING SESSIONS WERE  
CONDUCTED.**

**THESE SESSIONS REACHED A TOTAL OF  
3,919 ATTENDEES.**

In 2023, the modern slavery training program significantly ramped up its efforts, conducting 34 sessions that reached 1,281 attendees. This marked a notable increase in both the number and diversity of sessions compared to the previous year. The training covered a wide range of topics, tailored to various audiences including local partners, community groups, and professionals in sectors like healthcare and housing. These sessions not only enhanced awareness but also equipped attendees with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and respond to instances of modern slavery. This year's increased focus on training underscores our continued commitment to combating modern slavery through education and collaboration.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

The most engaged audience was SMBC professionals, with 19 sessions and 987 attendees.

## **SPECIALISED TOPICS**

Specialised topics like 'modern slavery in the care sector' and 'cuckooing' saw focused training efforts

## **COLLABRATIVE CHATS**

Collaborative chats with specific sectors like domiciliary care providers and housing teams were also integral parts of the training efforts.

# Elevating Our Response: Sandwell's 2024 Modern Slavery Training Plan

As we gear up for 2024, Sandwell is proud to unveil an ambitious and comprehensive training program designed to tackle the escalating challenges of modern slavery and human trafficking. Our program is thoughtfully structured into four levels, addressing the varied needs and expertise of participants, from foundational knowledge to strategic intervention.

**Level 1: Introduction to Modern Slavery** - This e-learning module is the gateway to understanding the fundamentals of modern slavery. It provides an overview of basic concepts, historical context, and the wider impact of these global issues.

**Level 2: Identifying the Unseen** - At this level, participants delve deeper, learning to identify diverse forms of modern slavery, understand their impact, and master the correct procedures for reporting and response.

**Level 3: First Response Tactics** - Tailored for frontline roles, this training equips participants with the skills to recognize modern slavery indicators and understand the responsibilities of a First Responder, including engagement with the National Referral Mechanism.

**Level 4: Equipping the Modern Slavery Workforce** - For those leading the fight, this advanced level focuses on disruption strategies, mastering referral processes, and responding to various forms of exploitation.

This robust training plan underscores our commitment to enhancing the capabilities of our workforce and community in combating modern slavery. By equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, we are strengthening our collective capacity to make a significant impact in this critical fight and working towards the regions public health approach to modern slavery.





# A Unified Front Against Modern Slavery: The Tipton Case Study



## Unified Front Against Modern Slavery

A pivotal case in Sandwell's fight against modern slavery unfolded when the Tipton Neighbourhood Team referred a concerning situation to the Community Safety Officer. A seemingly ordinary commercial property, previously a vape shop, was clandestinely operating as an unlicensed HMO, housing individuals in dire conditions.

### The Situation:

This property, amidst conversion into bedsits, was the scene of severe neglect and exploitation. Overcrowded and unsafe, it sheltered individuals, including international students and their dependents, in cramped and inhumane conditions. The landlord charged exorbitant rents for substandard living spaces, with no legal tenancy agreements, right-to-rent checks, or receipts for payments.



### Response and Partnerships:

SHOP's proactive approach involved a multi-agency response, spearheaded by Sandwell Council's Community Safety Officer for Modern Slavery and partners across various sectors. The coordinated operation conducted comprehensive building safety checks, screened individuals for exploitation signs, and inspected for illegal works. Partners included the Sandwell Council Housing team, West Midlands Police, Home Office Immigration, Fire Safety, British Gas, and RSPCA.



## Outcomes

Outcomes: The intervention led to significant outcomes:

- The property was deemed uninhabitable, and the landlord was served a prohibition notice.
- British Gas identified the boiler as unfit for use.
- 15 residents were found living in unsuitable conditions and were offered alternative accommodation.
- 3 individuals were detained by immigration authorities.
- Crucial intelligence was gathered on local businesses exploiting vulnerable workers.

***Through coordinated efforts and a strong community ethos, lives were changed, and safety was restored.***

***This case study is a testament to the dedication and effectiveness of the SHOP partnership in combating modern slavery and setting a precedent for future operations.***

### Impact and Future Action:

This case exemplifies the powerful impact of SHOP's modern slavery work and the partnership approach in Sandwell. It underscores the importance of a unified response, resulting in not just the disruption of a single exploitative location but also in giving hope and safety to individuals. The case stresses the necessity to tackle unlicensed HMOs and landlords exploiting vulnerabilities for profit. It highlights the ongoing challenge in Sandwell – the proliferation of poor living conditions and the exploitation they harbour.

## Reflecting on Our Collective Impact

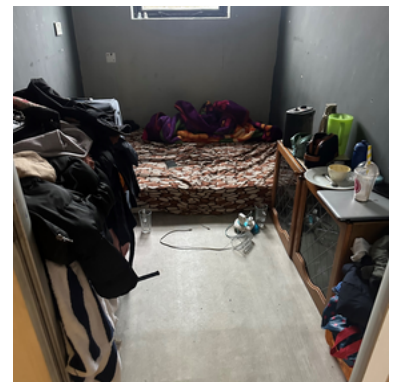
As we review the Tipton case, it's crucial to pause and reflect on the profound impact of our collective efforts. This intervention was not just about addressing a single instance of modern slavery; it was about setting a standard for what we can achieve through collaboration.

I am immensely proud of the swift and coordinated response that our team and partners exhibited. Each individual played a vital role, from the initial identification of the issue by the Tipton Neighbourhood Team and West Midlands Police to the life-changing support provided by our housing and welfare teams.

The involvement of external agencies like the Home Office Immigration team, West Midlands Fire Safety team, British Gas, and the RSPCA was pivotal in ensuring a holistic approach to the situation.

This case reinforces the necessity of our ongoing vigilance and responsiveness in the face of modern slavery. It also highlights the importance of our partnerships across various sectors. As we move forward, let's carry the lessons learned and the spirit of teamwork from this case to continue making a significant difference in the lives of those affected by modern slavery in our community.

Together, we are not just addressing cases; we are transforming lives and building a safer, more just society for all.



# Six defendants jailed for nearly 25 years

## United Against Slavery

This landmark conviction in Smethwick is a testament to our unwavering resolve and collaborative strength in the fight against modern slavery

## Empowerment through Awareness

Raising awareness is our most powerful tool; each informed individual becomes a crucial ally in identifying and preventing instances of exploitation

## Hope for the Future

Every survivor we support and every criminal network we dismantle brings us closer to a future where modern slavery is a relic of the past



(Top L-R) Buduru, Nicolae, Ifrim (bottom L-R) Culmici, Profira and Busteanu (Image: West Midlands Police)

In a remarkable display of collaboration and justice, the Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership (SHOP) played a pivotal role in a significant legal victory against modern slavery in Smethwick.

This collaborative success led to the sentencing of six individuals for nearly 25 years collectively, for their involvement in controlling prostitution.

## The Turning Point

The case unfolded with the courageous escape of an 18-year-old woman, who had been brought from Romania under false pretenses and forced into prostitution. Initially taken to a house on Arden Road and then to another on Parkes Street, she endured harrowing conditions, including threats, violence, and coercion.

## Collaborative Investigation Leads to Arrests

SHOP's involvement was crucial in the investigation that followed her escape. The partnership's approach to sharing intelligence and resources facilitated the swift action that was taken. Warrants executed at the properties and examination of seized mobile devices revealed damning evidence, including online adverts linked to the defendants and images of the victim.

## Sentencing and Justice Served

The defendants, Silvia Mimi Buduru, Florin Nicolae, Alexandra Ifrim, Leonard Culmici, Mariana Profira, and David Busteanu, faced the consequences of their actions with significant prison sentences. Their convictions are a clear message against the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and a testament to the effectiveness of our united efforts.

## A Reminder of Our Ongoing Battle

Detective Constable Harry Carley of West Midlands Police, reflecting on the case, highlighted the often-hidden nature of modern slavery. He called for continued vigilance from the public in spotting signs of such exploitation. This case is a stark reminder of the crucial role that awareness and partnership play in combating these hidden crimes.

## Our Unified Strength

As we share this good news, let's take a moment to recognise the power of collaboration and the impact of our collective efforts under SHOP. This case is not just a triumph of justice; it is a beacon of hope and a reinforcement of our commitment to eradicating modern slavery from our communities.