



**SCOTTISH BORDERS
IMPROVING THE
RESPONSE TO HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
LEARNING REPORT
October 2024**





This learning report aims to share the experience of improving the response to human trafficking in a rural local authority and is a culmination of the work of a short life working group and national support agencies.

INTRODUCTION

The launch of the refreshed National Referral Mechanism Toolkit by Scottish Government prompted the Scottish Borders to examine the existing use of the tool and to explore their current response to human trafficking in Scottish Borders.

As a delivery group of the Public Protection Committee, the Violence Against Women Partnership contacted the Scottish Government and Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) to seek guidance on the most effective way to introduce the refreshed NRM Toolkit.

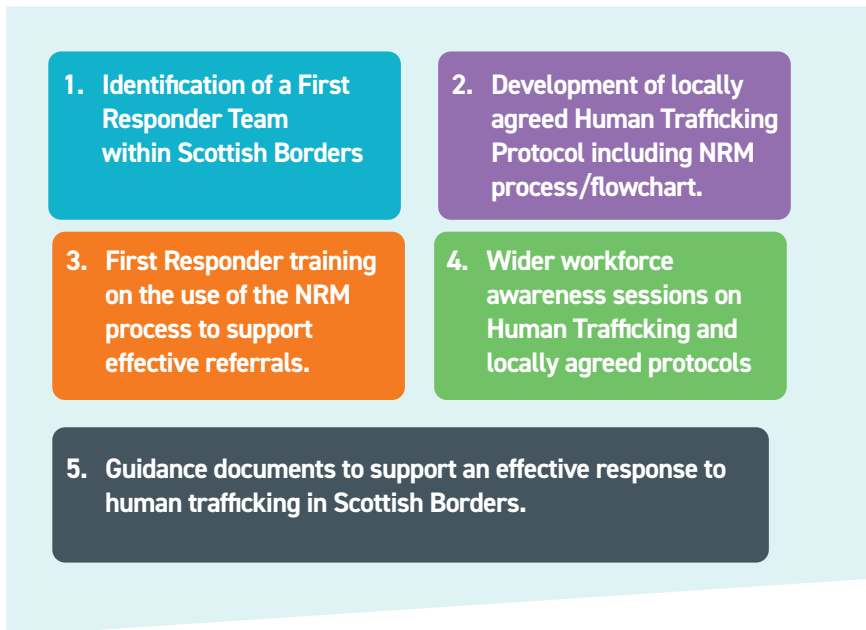
It was agreed to take the opportunity to create a Short Life Working Group and focus on the NRM Toolkit implementation in the context of a wider, improved response to human trafficking. This was against a backdrop of an increase in the number of both adult and child victims of trafficking being recovered in the Scottish Borders, and an acknowledgement that awareness of the issue and the local processes was inconsistent across both statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

Whilst coined a "pilot", the SLWG quickly established that the work would result in an implementation of key processes in and around the NRM Toolkit. The Group took the decision that without this framework, the quality of the NRM submissions and resulting decisions from the Home Office would not change.

Aim

To evaluate the impact of a structured implementation of the NRM toolkit for First Responder agencies in the Scottish Borders by providing a framework linking strategic leadership to frontline practice and protocol development.

Outcomes



Short Life Working Group

The **short life working group** was chaired by the Scottish Borders VAW Coordinator, with administrative support provided by Scottish Borders Council Transformation team. The group met every 2 months between 2022 and 2024.

Members included:

- Scottish Borders Child Protection
- Scottish Borders Adult Protection
- NHS Public Protection
- SBC Homelessness
- SBC Emergency Duty Team
- SBC Transitions Team
- Police Scotland
- Children1st
- Border Women's Aid
- Scottish Government
- COSLA
- TARA

A Terms of Reference was established and standard project management tools such as Action Tracker, Implementation Plan etc. were used. Regular reports were submitted to the Public Protection Committee as part of the **governance** for the work.

For the **workforce development** element, the support of TARA, Migrant Help, Just Right Scotland and the Anchor Project was enlisted.

There was no budget allocated to this work, other than the contribution of the VAW Coordinator as Chair and administrative support, given "in kind".



LEARNING

GOAL

In establishing outcomes for an improved response, it is important to be clear about the goal. Tackling human trafficking requires a multi-agency response, both strategic and operational, and is influenced by many factors, some which are out with the control of any group trying to work towards a more robust response.

Scottish Borders started with the goal “to implement the newly refreshed NRM Toolkit.” It was clear that this was not enough, but it did present a golden opportunity to examine the response more widely.

Using locally available data, and the expertise of those working directly with victims, the SLWG were able to agree that the response in the Scottish Borders needed to improve to ensure all agencies were aware of their obligations and support/safety was available to any potential victim of trafficking.

Points to consider:

1. Be clear about what it is you are trying to change and why.
2. What are the gaps but what is working well?
3. Who knows what?

PARTNERSHIPS

Scottish Borders SLWG delivered on the agreed outcomes by fostering a partnership approach utilising specialist agencies, strategic leads, new partners and existing partners, at both local and national level.

This was a proactive way to ensure that the right people were round the table at each stage of development. Each agency agreed to the Terms of Reference and the implementation plan was structured to ensure that actions aligned to the most relevant partner agency. The length of the SLWG meant that for some agencies their input/actions were time critical eg delivery of training, however they remained active members of the group.

The support of national organisations was vital to delivery of the work. The SLWG relied heavily on expertise at times of debate eg new referral routes, targeting workforce training, or when legal information was required eg First Responder training. All national organisations offered their support willingly and added credibility and validity to training events. However, there remains the question of sustainability and capacity for specialist agencies that have a national remit. The SLWG are very aware that this level of support may not be available to refresh, update and evaluate any further work on human trafficking.



There is, therefore, a strong argument for developing local expertise, supporting “champions” and ensuring First Responders are supported to keep developing the skills to submit quality NRM’s. Local gender-based violence services may also play a critical role in the wider “awareness raising” that will be required. With an integrated Public Protection Unit, the Scottish Borders has well-developed partnership working which provided a good foundation for basing discussions, suggested actions, and clarity on existing processes.

Points to consider:

1. Have the right people at the right time.
2. Test case – map against any suggested improvement and look at implications for services, staff or victims.
3. Build local expertise: invest in key agencies/staff to maintain resilience.
4. Commit to annual refresher/updates on human trafficking.

PROCESSES

To enable the SLWG members to “all be on the same page” in relation to the existing response and how an improved response would look, a workshop was held for them using anonymised case studies from the Scottish Borders.

An adult case study showed the importance of a trauma informed approach, the challenges of information sharing, No Recourse to Public Funds, consent, and assessing risk.

A young person’s case study also highlighted the gaps in knowledge, as well as revealing a growing understanding of the needs of young people potentially trafficked into, or through the Scottish Borders, accessing the Transitions team.

The most fundamental shift in progress followed the workshop, when it was agreed that all potential trafficking cases/concerns would follow the same, current Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) process in the Public Protection Unit. This was a significant decision but in exploring the pros and cons it still enabled potential victims to access specialist support from national services and “wrap around” care, whilst assessments were conducted. The over-riding message from partners was “keep it simple,” acknowledging that there were processes in place to protect people.

Communication to staff was also critical but supported through a current process of leads in the PPU for Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and Police Scotland being responsible for dissemination. Wider agency communication would also be harnessed through the Public Protection Committee members.

Points to consider:

1. Look at what you already do – can it be adapted?
2. Test a case through existing processes.
3. Agree where changes would have the biggest impact.
4. How will you communicate any changes to any existing processes?



MULTI AGENCY GUIDANCE

Existing Human Trafficking Multi-Agency Guidance (2019) was available to review and amend. This was critical given the new referral processes for victims, key roles for agencies, updated legislation and supporting information to maintain awareness in the multi-agency workforce.

Although it was a significant production to update this guidance with many iterations, drafts, and discussions, the SLWG agreed that it was a worthwhile exercise and provided a solid base for any future reviews.

To help the multi-agency guidance reach the appropriate audience it is hosted in both the Child and Adult Support and Protection Procedures and is available to all agencies in the Scottish Borders as the expected response to trafficking. The guidance will be reviewed annually.

Points to consider:

1. Host guidance, policies and protocols available in the places most staff get information.
2. Use existing guidance and refresh.
3. If access to people with lived experience is available, consult with them.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The SLWG were committed to using the work to improve the response to human trafficking to include the workforce to be “part of the solution” and to extend human trafficking awareness to services in the community, allowing those with the “eyes and ears” to be better equipped to spot the signs of trafficking. This was in recognition that irrespective of the robust referral pathways, if early identification and intervention was not promoted, we would potentially miss many victims of trafficking.

The existing Child Protection Learning and Development Framework tiered approach to the workforce was used to determine what type of training was required and for whom. The SLWG worked with national partners to develop the materials and targeted the workforce groups through the membership.

Training was planned and delivered between May and November 2023.

Tier 1 General Workforce - online training attracted 148 participants, led by TARA.

Tier 2 Frontline Service Practitioners - online training attracted 70 participants delivered by TARA, Migrant Help and the Anchor Project.

Tier 3 First Responder Team training was delivered to 18 staff who would undertake the role as First Responders. This was an in person, full day session supported by TARA, Migrant Help, Just Right Scotland and the Anchor Project. The day enabled staff to focus on the practicalities of a First Responder Team and the importance of a trauma informed response.

Online sessions were planned for different days/times to maximise attendance and First Responder training was in person with TARA, Migrant Help, Just Right Scotland and the Anchor Project (who provided the trauma informed approach to victims). All training highlighted the referral processes pertinent to the workforce group. Online training was effective for a rural local authority, removing the travel time required to attend, offering flexibility to a wider range of agencies with delivery outwith core hours. It also enabled the national support agencies to bring their expertise and knowledge to the Scottish Borders more easily.



The training evaluated very well, and the online format worked exceptionally well, enabling a wider range of people to attend.

Points to consider:

1. Provide workforce development according to role/remit or existing frameworks.
2. Agree key messages for each workforce grouping.
3. Provide simple flowcharts, aide memoires to assist staff to seek advice, or make referrals.
4. Online training can be highly effective.
5. Build a suite of materials and support local staff to deliver; use local data as referrals increase.
6. Consider Human Trafficking Awareness as part of the annual child protection/adult protection training.
7. Consider e learning as an introductory awareness session for staff.

EVALUATION

The impact of the Scottish Borders efforts to improve the response to human trafficking will be evaluated both quantitatively via data from NRM referrals, referrals to IRD and decisions, and qualitatively, by engaging with the First Responder team for a reflective practice session which will examine the processes, highlight any challenges, and look to fine tune any of the processes. Annual Human Trafficking Awareness will be offered by the VAW Partnership and by the e-learning course available to staff across Scottish Borders Council. Existing methods of gathering data from recording systems will enable further discussions re the source of referrals etc and where further targeted work may be required.

ACCEPT...

There will be factors that come into play that no working group could predict or respond to, for example the introduction of two new pieces of legislation, the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023, caused some concern for the short life working group.

Again however, an input by Just Right Scotland exploring the impact on victims, decision makers etc., enabled the SLWG to proceed on the basis that their plans for an improved response was too important to wait on evidence of the “real life” impact of the new Acts, and they felt very supported by national partners who were able to give as up-to-date information as was available to them.

The legislative and policy framework around Human Trafficking is one of “shifting sands” eg No recourse to public funds, NTS (National Transfer Scheme), NRM threshold changes, NRM negative decisions, duty to notify etc. However, with a solid framework and well understood referral process, an increasing confidence, competence, and partnership working with experts, will all help alleviate some of the impact.

Points to consider:

1. Build a network of “go to” partners.
2. Consider what legislative changes impacts the most.
3. Learn from others.
4. Use case reviews to evaluate outcomes from referrals in relation to legislation.
5. What do you need to know and who needs to know it?

Finally....

The Short Life Working Group ended in November 2024 following a national event hosted by Scottish Borders to share the learning.

A final thanks must go to all the partner agencies who contributed time, energy, expertise and skill and the timely reminder from the TARA Advisory Group who shared their lived experience and support for the work in Scottish Borders

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