

Report to: Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

Date of meeting: 18 September 2023

By: Chief Operating Officer

Title: East Sussex County Council's Modern Slavery Statement for the financial year ending 2022/2023

Purpose: To provide a progress update of East Sussex County Council's Modern Slavery Statement to the Deputy Leader (Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change) and to seek his signature of approval

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change (Deputy Leader) is recommended to co-sign the Modern Slavery Statement together with the Chief Executive

1 Background

1.1 Modern slavery is an umbrella term used to describe situations of exploitation where people are exploited for financial gain. It refers to situations that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception and/or abuse of power and vulnerability. It encompasses practices such as slavery, forced labour or compulsory labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

1.2 The key legislation in the UK on this issue is the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Section 54 of the Act requires commercial organisations with an annual turnover of £36 million or more to report publicly on their efforts to address modern slavery in their operations and supply chains. To comply with the legislation, organisations meeting the threshold are legally required to publish a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year outlining the steps taken (or not taken) by the organisation to address modern slavery during this year. Statements must be approved at the highest level of an organisation, signed by the most senior member of the organisation, and published on their website with a link in a prominent place on their homepage.

1.3 Following an independent review and public consultation of the legislation, the government announced in 2020 plans to make changes to the legislation. One of these changes is the extension of Section 54 obligations to public bodies with a budget of £36 million or more, including local authorities in England and Wales. While extending Section 54 will require legislative changes, in March 2022 the Home Office acknowledged in a letter to public sector bodies that this change will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows and encouraged organisations to in any case produce a statement for the 21/22 financial year by 30 September 2022.

1.4 According to [statutory guidance](#), the statement should focus specifically on supply chains and business operations and must "describe the steps your organisation has taken during the financial year to deal with modern slavery risks in your supply chains and your own business." Currently, statutory guidance recommends that statements include information on the following areas:

- Organisation structure and supply chains;
- Policies in relation to slavery and human trafficking;
- Due diligence processes;
- Risk assessment and management;
- Key performance indicators to measure effectiveness of steps being taken; and

- Training on modern slavery and trafficking.

1.5 The government announced plans to mandate the above reporting areas and so the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) statement covers each of these areas.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The statement set out in Appendix 1 is ESCC's second Modern Slavery Statement and has been drafted by Orbis Senior Policy Lead on Modern Slavery.

2.2 ESCC, Surrey County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council have agreed that the responsibility for implementing approaches to responding to modern slavery in their operations and supply chains will rest with Orbis Procurement.

2.3 The 2022/2023 statement relates to the steps taken by ESCC during the financial year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 to mitigate risks of modern slavery within its supply chains. Performance indicators are being developed, as detailed in the statement, and will be used to report on 2023/2024 activity.

2.4 The aim is to have the statement published on ESCC's website and uploaded to the government's modern slavery registry by 30 September 2023 once it has been co-signed by the Chief Executive and Deputy Leader of the Council (Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change).

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 This report has been brought to the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change (Deputy Leader) as a progress update on ESCC's work on modern slavery and to seek the co-signing of the statement.

3.2 Although not yet formally mandated, the government has indicated that local authorities with an annual budget of more than £36 million should comply with the requirements of section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and publish a slavery and human trafficking statement. ESCC's 2022/23 statement, as set out in Appendix 1, is designed to comply with this requirement.

3.3 The statement must be approved at the highest level of the organisation and signed by the most senior member of the organisation. The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change (Deputy Leader) is therefore recommended to co-sign the Modern Slavery Statement together with the Chief Executive.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None