

## **Human trafficking:**

### **Background**

Human trafficking referrals in Northern Ireland continue to increase year on year. In 2015/16 PSNI conducted 252 screening assessments and from these, 59 potential victims of human trafficking were recovered in Northern Ireland – an increase on 46 the previous year.

A consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy closed on 9 September 2016 and we had hoped to be in a position to publish the strategy by the end of September but have had to defer publication as the consultation process raised some substantive points. We plan to provide a revised strategy to the Justice Committee on 27 October with a view to publication as soon as possible after that. In the meantime work continues against the strategy whilst in draft.

The Anti-Slavery Commissioner's annual report was published on 12 October 2015. It welcomes the positive developments over the past year and praises the PSNI for recording 100% of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism as human trafficking or exploitation offences on their database, noting that other UK forces should follow this example.

EU Member States' compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings is monitored by a Group of Experts on Action against Human Trafficking, more commonly known as GRETA. In October 2015, a GRETA delegation visited Northern Ireland as part of its second round assessment of the UK's compliance with the Convention. The final version of GRETA's second round evaluation report on the United Kingdom's compliance was published on 7 October 2016.

### **Lines to take**

- Tackling human trafficking and exploitation is a complex task but I am pleased to note that good progress is being made.

- A robust legal framework is in place which has been bolstered by recent legislative developments such as the commencement of the regime for Slavery and Trafficking. This is complemented by a raft of non-legislative action such as awareness raising amongst the general public and training of frontline staff.
- The ethos of partnership is evident through all strands of work on this issue and this has led to victims being rescued, perpetrators being pursued and at-risk communities being equipped to protect themselves.
- I am confident that this good work will continue through the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy for 2016/17, which I intend to publish by the end of this month.
- I welcome the publication of the Anti-Slavery Commissioner's annual report and GRETA's second round evaluation report. Both reports make specific reference to the commendable efforts made in Northern Ireland to tackle human trafficking and slavery.
- Anti-Slavery Day takes place tomorrow (18 October) and various events have been planned by civil society groups represented on my Department's Human Trafficking Engagement Group. For example, Soroptimist International is conducting a survey in shopping centres and public places around Northern Ireland, both to raise public awareness and gauge public perceptions of human trafficking and modern slavery.
- Also, the IDMG on Modern Slavery, which I am represented on, will publish a report providing an assessment of modern slavery across the United Kingdom.