

To consider future developments with regards to addressing and reducing on-street sex work in the city

Date: 23rd June 2021

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- On the 20th July 2020, Members of Executive Board received a report titled 'The Managed Approach Independent Review'. This report documented the findings and recommendations from the Independent Review of the Managed Approach (MA) in Leeds. Members agreed that Executive Board should be kept informed and updated on any key changes proposed arising from the independent review which this report now seeks to do.
- This report sets out proposals for evolving our approach to addressing and responding to the issue of on-street sex work in Leeds. The proposals contained in this report build on the successes and developments of the Managed Approach since its introduction in 2014; the outcomes of the Independent Review into the MA; the Voice of Holbeck's Listening Well campaign, and; importantly, the data and intelligence picture which evidences a significant reduction in the number of women engaging in on-street sex work in the city.
- The MA represents a multi-faceted, multi-professional, co-ordinated response to managing on-street sex work in Leeds and the issues and problems associated with it.
- The MA was developed and introduced by the Safer Leeds Partnership in October 2014, initially for a one-year trial period, as a response to the various issues concerning pre-existing on-street sex work in the Holbeck area of South Leeds, particularly the high number of reports and complaints of sex work in residential areas and the low rate of reporting crimes and linked incidents to the police.
- Leeds has an ambition to have a strong economy whilst being a compassionate city. A key dimension of this is tackling poverty and inequality. The MA is a strategic response to managing pre-existing on-street sex work in the city, with the ambition of reducing the prevalence of street-based sex working in Leeds as well reducing the problems caused by on-street sex working to residents and businesses which currently suffer from such nuisance. It also seeks to improve engagement with street sex workers to facilitate the

provision of appropriate support to improve their safety, health and wellbeing and to enable them to ultimately exit on-street sex work.

- The objectives of the MA support the strategic objectives of Safe, Strong Communities as part of the focus on keeping people safe from harm, protecting the most vulnerable and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

Recommendations

Members of Executive Board are recommended to:

- a) Endorse the proposal to now cease with the Managed Approach and replace it with the revised approach outlined in this report to tackle and reduce on-street sex work in the city, subject to agreement by the Safer Leeds Community Safety Partnership (LSP);
- b) Acknowledge and note the significance of the operational developments leading to the proposed revised approach;
- c) Note that the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment, and where appropriate partner organisations and representatives, will be responsible for delivering the revised approach, and;
- d) Agree that members of the Executive Board be kept informed and updated on any key changes arising from the implementation of the new approach.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Police and all partners in the Safer Leeds Community Safety Partnership remain committed to managing on-street sex work in the most appropriate manner possible in order to reduce harm associated with on-street sex work and meet the three key aims of our strategy, those being:
 - to reduce the problems caused by on-street prostitution to residents and businesses which currently suffer such nuisance;
 - to better engage with on-street sex workers to improve their safety, health and wellbeing with a view to reducing their need to be actively involved in sex work, and;
 - to reduce the prevalence of on-street sex work in the city.
- 2 The proposals contained within this report further build on improved outcomes that have been progressively delivered with the MA since alterations were made to the governance and operational delivery arrangements in 2018 and acknowledged in the Independent Review of the MA. They also link to recommendations in that same report aimed at ensuring the approach within the MA continued to evolve cognisant of relevant developments.
- 3 We have also sought to capture the learning about what has worked with regards the delivery of support to sex workers following the advent of the coronavirus pandemic and the introduction of public guidance and associated legislation regarding social distancing and gatherings. In essence, the Managed Approach has not operated in its previous form since mid-March 2020 when coronavirus restrictions were first introduced. Since March 2020, the Safer Leeds partnership has sought to utilise every power at its disposal to make sure that the coronavirus restriction measures are properly adhered to. Just as importantly, the variety of support put in place through the initiative to protect the health and welfare of all

sex workers has also evolved and we are now able to provide better access to support services, accommodation and welfare assistance which are all factors which contribute to sex workers reducing the hours they work and in some instances exiting on-street work in full.

- 4 An evaluation of the current picture in the Managed Approach area has found the number of sex workers currently operating to be now substantially lower compared to numbers before the Managed Approach was introduced. The impact of coronavirus over the past year, coupled with the progress the partnership have secured through the delivery of a cohesive, comprehensive partnership plan put in place to support sex workers in terms of their health, safety and wellbeing, provide signposting to important services such as housing and substance misuse support and the work done to support the local community and significantly reduce the adverse consequences of on-street sex work taking place in a particular community have all contributed to this reduction.

Case Study 1

B had a history of prolific on-street sex working for some years which increased up to 2020. Her behaviour escalated to the point of the partnership exploring an anti-social behaviour injunction due to a high level of very challenging behaviour. The Managed Approach policing team colleagues continued their support and engagement through the Managed Approach partnership and via the sex worker liaison police officer.

B finally engaged with Basis and Forward Leeds and was supported in a number of ways including through their outreach work. She is now accessing intensive support through the Housing First programme and continues to make very good progress. In addition to not engaging in sex work, she is also being supported by Forward Leeds with her addiction issues. B also has regular family contact now in place which is assisting in terms of her wider support and coping mechanisms.

- 5 Taking these factors into account and supported and informed by partnership intelligence and data, it is proposed that further changes in terms of the operational and strategic management of our approach to managing on-street sex work are now progressed.
- 6 These changes will continue to deliver against the three strategic aims of our approach to managing on-street sex work in the city but will amount to:
 - The MA's previously defined hours of operation (pre March 2020 - 8pm to 6am) whereby women could solicit for sex without being subject to police engagement and enforcement action in specific circumstances will not be re-introduced into the partnership working arrangements. This change reflects the current situation concerning on-street sex work in the area and the reduced number of women known to be actively involved. The introduction of this element of the Managed Approach was to manage a very specific problem at the time linked to a high volume of active sex workers which did not significantly reduce despite many enforcement led initiatives over a long period of time. This issue in terms of numbers and the impact on the local community caused by on-street sex work has now significantly changed and this change in policy reflects that.
 - As such, no soliciting offences will be allowed to take place at any time in the area previously covered by the Managed Approach. Appropriate powers will be proportionately used to seek to prevent soliciting taking place in any area of the city where it may be occurring. This new approach will send a very clear message that any individual wishing to purchase sex on the street of Leeds will not be encouraged in any

way to return to any area of city. Whilst all legal powers will be used as necessary and appropriate, our focus will continue to be on providing meaningful support to help sex workers to improve their safety, health and wellbeing with a view to enabling them to exit this way of life. There will, however, be a renewed focus on seeking to use all legal powers available to partners against those seeking to pay for sex. These developments will be subject of ongoing assessment and set within the operational context in which on-street sex work is taking place.

- Work is also currently being undertaken to assess the feasibility of introducing a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in selected residential areas located near where sex work has been identified as taking place. A PSPO is an order that identifies the public place and prohibits specific things being done in a restricted area and/or requires specific things to be done by persons carrying on specified activities in that area. Failure to comply with a PSPO is an offence. If granted, this will provide additional powers to tackle issues such as anti-social behaviour and on-street drinking and in so doing provide staff operating in these residential areas with additional powers to take action, including the issuing of on-the-spot fines against anyone found to be involved in this type of activity. In assessing the feasibility of introducing a PSPO it will be important to ensure that any offences committed are proportionately managed recognising the potential vulnerability of people living in challenging circumstances and, therefore, any enforcement activity will need to be carefully balanced with outreach and support.
- 7 With the significant changes now proposed, and the fact that the Managed Approach is synonymous with a defined geographic area previously referenced as the 'Managed Area', it is now proposed that the Managed Approach formally comes to an end. The cessation of the MA at this time builds on the successes and developments of the Managed Approach since its introduction in 2014; the outcomes of the Independent Review into the MA; the Voice of Holbeck's Listening Well campaign, and; importantly, the data and intelligence picture which evidences a significant reduction in the number of women engaging in on-street sex work in the city.
- 8 Whilst it is proposed that the Managed Approach will now cease, we recognise that some degree of sex work is still likely to be seen in Holbeck and surrounding areas as there remains a small number who, for many different and often complex reasons, wish to continue operating. It is for this reason that other important elements of our work will continue including: the dedicated police patrols; the extensive use of public CCTV; late night Safer Leeds high visibility mobile and foot patrols; the dedicated street cleansing service; as well as outreach activity and the full range of support services assisting the women involved. It is acknowledged that these key components of our response work well and will continue to be utilised for as long as on-street sex work exists in Leeds.

Case Study 2

C started sex working in 2019 whilst in the early stages of pregnancy. She was quickly engaged by various partners in the Managed Approach including police, Basis and Joanna Project. Her relationship with statutory partners prior to this period was not a positive one but through the approach adopted she was supported by Basis and Forward Leeds who provided assistance with a range of complex needs. This included support to address health-related needs as well as other needs relating to lifestyle, including financial support. C gave birth and continued to sex work and use Class A drugs. With continued engagement and support C is no longer sex working, is engaging well with support from Forward Leeds in relation to her drugs programme and has moved out of the area with supervised access to her children.

- 9 Our overall approach to addressing the issues associated with on-street sex work has and will continue to evolve as is necessary and linked to the current circumstances of on-street sex work being experienced in the city. The decision to now cease with the Managed Approach by removing the set hours of operation within a specified geographic zone and progressing the development of a PSPO in the local area has been taken following an assessment using intelligence, police incident/crime report data and after consultation with key stakeholders including representatives from the local Holbeck community. These changes are significant and will see what was the Managed Approach now evolve into a new approach to managing on-street sex work. The new approach will continue to focus on reducing harm associated with on-street sex work and on delivering the three key aims of our over-arching strategy.

Case Study 3

F had a number of complex needs including drug addiction, poor mental health and ongoing sex work with high risk behaviours. F had been provided with temporary accommodation but was struggling to maintain the accommodation offer because of various factors, including drug use. A meeting was held with the partnership agencies to discuss F's needs and how they could work together to support her to achieve her goals. F expressed that she would like to go to detox rehabilitation so a referral was made and she successfully gained a place. However, part way through F exited the programme unplanned and returned to Leeds. Agencies quickly linked in with one another to understand why F had left the programme and worked together to support her to access it once again. F is now back in the detox unit, is doing well and is not engaged in sex work.

- 10 There are no plans to reduce resourcing currently deployed to address on-street sex work in the city. We continue to believe the safest approach is to neither sell nor buy sex on the street, and the ideal outcome continues to be that street sex work does not exist.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected: Beeston & Holbeck

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 11 The revised approach should see better outcomes being sustained for both women involved in on-street sex work and the local community in which it is taking place. This is assessed and measured dynamically and over longer time periods with the partnership work being delivered within our recognised Bronze, Silver and Gold governance arrangements that sees accountability sit with the statutory community safety arrangements in the city - the Safer Leeds Executive at Gold. The assessment includes a mix of quantitative data sets from partners, intelligence and other more qualitative sources of information used to monitor development and ensure resources are used to best effective with regards delivery of our strategic intent.

D had previously been a prolific on-street sex worker who had been subject to enforcement action for a number of months due to her chaotic and problematic behaviour which put herself at risk and caused anti-social behaviour related issues within the local community. She subsequently built up stronger relationships with partners through the intensive work and support she was in receipt of, and overtime she began to engage well with Joanna Project, particularly through the pandemic period of 2020. The links with Joanna Project helped D to forge a better relationship with Forward Leeds in relation to her addiction issues. D has now successfully completed a programme that has seen her become completely free from drugs and she has not sex worked since the summer of 2020.

12 What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Officers and partners have been engaging with a full range of stakeholders seeking their views on how to best to develop the approach over recent months and using feedback secured by both the Independent Review in to the MA conducted by academics at Huddersfield University as well as extensively engaging local Holbeck based stakeholders, including active Executive Member and officer support for an organised community 'Listening Well' process involving a large number of local people and locally based community organisations. Most recently a new Holbeck based Communication and Engagement Group has been set up involving local people supported by Beeston and Holbeck ward councillors and officers and this group has provided feedback with regards supporting the proposed changes to our approach. Commissioned and third sector support through BASIS and the Joanna Project have also been engaged with mixed feedback having been received recognising the diverse group of people those organisations support.

What are the resource implications?

- 13 There are no additional resource implications arising out of this proposal. The existing resources engaged on the partnership MA team in terms of statutory, commissioned services (BASIS) and third sector support (Joanna Project) will continue to operate in a coordinated way.

What are the legal implications?

- 14 There are no legal implications at this stage.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 15 The key risk is that with the cessation of the managed approach we could see an increase in sex work in areas outside of the current MA designated area. Whilst this is possible, our data and intelligence on those individuals engaged in sex work is now far more sophisticated than it was pre-2014 and with the support and dedicated resourcing that we now have in place we are confident that such risks can be managed and mitigated. Our overall approach to addressing the issues associated with on-street sex work will continue to evolve as is necessary and linked to the current and future circumstances of on-street sex work being experienced in the city. In considering the risk of vulnerability, our new approach will continue to focus on reducing harm associated with on-street sex work and on delivering the three key aims of our over-arching strategy.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

16 Leeds has an ambition to be a city with a strong economy whilst being a compassionate city. A key dimension of this is tackling poverty and inequality. The approach to tackling on-street sex work related issues is a strategic response to managing pre-existing on-street sex work with the ambition of reducing the prevalence of street-based sex working in Leeds reducing the problems caused by on-street sex working to residents and businesses which currently suffer from such nuisance. It also seeks to improve engagement with street sex workers to facilitate the provision of appropriate support to improve their health, safety and wellbeing and enable them to exit on-street work. This is consistent with our efforts to provide safer and stronger communities protecting the most vulnerable.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

This is a proposal to improve services already being delivered and to achieve stated objectives. The key alternative option would be to not make these strategic and operational changes however this would risk seeing an increase in the number of women engaging in on-street sex work, particularly when coronavirus restrictions are further lifted.

b) How will success be measured?

The revised approach should see better outcomes being sustained for both women involved in on-street sex work and the local community in which it is taking place. This is assessed and measured both dynamically and over longer time periods with accountability sitting at the Safer Leeds Community Safety Partnership. The assessment includes a mix of quantitative data sets from partners, intelligence and other more qualitative sources of information used to monitor developments and ensure resources are used to best effective with regards delivery of the strategic intent.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

As soon as practically possible and subject to appropriate ongoing consultation requirements associated with introducing PSPOs and agreement through the Safer Leeds Community Safety Partnership.

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.

Background papers

There are no background documents relevant.