

**PROSTITUTION STRATEGY  
FOR  
LEEDS**

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## PROSTITUTION STRATEGY FOR LEEDS

### Introduction

Recently published research by the Home Office has established that over 80,000 women across the UK are allegedly involved in prostitution. In London, where the majority of the research was focused, there are between 3000 to 6000 women working in 700 brothels. In the same city it was stated that 8.9% of men have paid for sex in the last ten years.

In 2004, nationally there were 1744 convictions for loitering or soliciting with an additional 808 convictions for kerb crawling.

In January 2006 the Government published its document 'A coordinated Prostitution Strategy - and a summary of responses to *Paying the Price*' which sets out its approach to combating the anti-social issues of prostitution and addresses key areas of prevention and support to women by developing routes out to those who are seeking to exit prostitution. The key objectives of the national strategy are to:

- Challenge the view that street prostitution is here to stay
- Achieve an overall reduction in street prostitution
- Improve the safety and quality of life for communities affected by prostitution, including those directly involved in prostitution.
- Reduce all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

Leeds has a prolific sex industry with informed intelligence suggesting that in excess of 250 women are working on the streets of the city with an estimated similar number further working from off-street premises in brothels and saunas. This level of activity has been identified as having a significant impact on crime figures in two policing areas of the city (Chapeltown and City & Holbeck) where street prostitution is overt with a resulting negative effect on communities and business investment.

Over the past two years Leeds has made many positive changes to the activities related to prostitution both in the enforcement of the law and the support mechanisms required to assist women working as prostitutes to change their lifestyles, improve their health and seek more work and training opportunities. The publication of the Government's strategy document acted, in many ways, as an endorsement of the actions already on-going across the city by the partnership agencies linked through Safer Leeds.

Whilst we acknowledge that the main focus and language of the Leeds strategy is street based prostitution, it is essential that our services can also meet the needs of off street sex workers, the victims of trafficking and males engaged in prostitution. In line with the national strategy, the Leeds strategy is focused on the following key areas:

- Prevention – As national statistics indicate that over half of those involved in street prostitution enter at a young age ( about 13/14 yrs) a clear message is required in relation to the dangers involved in prostitution. This must be supported by targeted intervention measures for both young people identified in need of help and those already engaged in the system seeking help and support. Similarly we must ensure that Police activities are also alert to the issues of trafficking and women forced to work as prostitutes in off-street premises against their will.
  - Tackling Supply and Demand – with a concentrated focus on the demand side of the market through tackling kerb crawlers and individuals who exploit women for commercial gain. We will apply a rigorous use of both civil and criminal law to reduce the level of street prostitution across the city. We will strive to engage all stakeholder agencies to improve environmental measures to further deter kerb crawling and enhance the confidence of communities of our commitment to the problem
  - Developing routes out – through the development of dedicated support projects moving beyond harm minimisation in providing real opportunities for women to move on in their lives. These services will strengthen existing partnerships with the Police and the Drugs Intervention Programme through working with women engaged in prostitution committing crime to fund drug misuse.
  - Ensuring Justice – through an encouragement of proactive policing and optimal utilisation of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. We are seeking to encourage training and capacity building of our staff and increase the confidence of the community in the criminal justice system. Continued support for the Incident Reporting Scheme currently in operation across the city will confirm the city's commitment to the vulnerable women and young people who utilise this facility.
- And of most importance....**
- Delivering the strategy – through establishing a clear policy based on the provision of appropriate tools and using good practice models to underpin it. The strategic leadership will be through the Safer Leeds Partnership and will focus on community involvement and linking with the national Respect agenda.

## Prevention

Our approach will focus on the following key areas:

- The identification of children at risk of sexual exploitation and developing opportunities for early intervention.
- Focussed work with looked after children and young people in care

- Focussed work with children experiencing Domestic Violence and/ or affected by sexual abuse.
- Work with children and young people affected by sexual exploitation by a third party such as pimps and traffickers
- Raise awareness among parents and carers about sexual grooming and involve them in work supporting interventions
- Children missing from home
- Young people using drugs
- Reduction in truancy rates and increased awareness about sexual exploitation
- Increase in the number of prosecutions against those sexually grooming and exploiting children through designated police teams, Child and Public Protection Units and Operation Pentameter.
- Increase understanding and awareness in all adult drugs services to identify and support those involved in or at risk of becoming involved in prostitution.

As part of challenging the objectification of women and the view that street prostitution is here to stay, we will make key links with the Leeds Domestic Violence strategy to raise public awareness of the impacts of prostitution on individuals, families and communities.

We will further seek to ensure a robust application of the key principles of *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* with the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to coordinate and implement activities to promote safety for children across Leeds. The LSCB functions will include:

- Developing policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the care of the local authority.
- Ensuring that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is taken into account in the planning and commissioning of children's services
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done by the local authority and board partners individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- Advising them on ways to improve
- Better use of the Common Assessment Framework to provide a coordinated range of services.
- A holistic approach to support and protection. Experience has taught us that providing adult services for young people is inappropriate and that dedicated child focused services are essential.

We further need to improve PHSCE lessons on sexual health, internet safety, relationships and exploitation. Effective links with schools, Connexions and Pupil Referral Unit's and the Youth Justice Board will seek to provide better information and advice available for young people.

## Tackling Supply and Demand

One of the most important elements of an effective strategy is the visible impact that the delivery of the strategy has on the communities in which prostitution is openly active.

The Chapeltown area has had a long-standing problem with prostitution and the key streets around Spencer Place, Leeds 8 have been the focus for overt street prostitution with a high media coverage in the 1980's throughout the series of 'Ripper' murders. More recently, however, the area covered by City and Holbeck which stretches from the established properties in Lower Beeston, to the city centre along the waterfront and into the new residential area of Holbeck has seen in excess of 200 women engaged in prostitution which equates to nearly 80% of those known to be involved in street prostitution in the city.

Changing patterns of prostitution has led to the issues becoming more overt with more women working throughout the majority of the day.

In Leeds, we will continue to target those men who travel to parts of the city to solicit prostitutes for sex. Whilst it is acknowledged that addressing the issue of demand is both complex and linked to behavioural activity, previous research in other parts of the country (Ward et al 2005) has shown that activity by Police to target kerb crawlers and imposing visible and highly punitive sentences has not resulted in any significant increase in prosecutions and the steady increase in the demand for sexual services remains.

Whilst the initial response to this form of police activity is often equated to a displacement of the problem to other areas, the facts are that this is not the case if the enforcement of demand activity is also supported by substantial exiting options for the women. Many of the answers can also be attributed to wider changes in sexual attitudes, divorce rates and the commercialisation of other sex markets etc.

However, kerb crawlers still offer the following threats to communities:

- Unwanted propositioning of local residents, particularly women walking to and from their homes or workplaces in key times of the day
- Residents who seek to complain are fearful of identification

In addition, active prostitution within a community also brings with it the following problems:

- Hazardous waste - condoms and needles which can be potentially infected with Blood Borne Viruses such as Hepatitis C and HIV
- Increased traffic brought about by kerb crawlers seeking women for sex at all hours of the day and night
- Increased crime and disorder, particularly violence including an increase in sexual offences, street robberies and the visible activity of drug dealing on the streets
- Sex in public places

- Significant impact on the economic viability of businesses, property values and economic regeneration of the areas...

The resulting impact on a community is invariably a change of daily life, fear of victimisation and an embarrassment about the area in which they live.

In delivering the Leeds Strategy we will:

Robustly apply all legal sanctions within the law with particular focus on the powers contained within the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and other supporting civil and criminal legislation:

- Driving disqualifications for kerb crawlers
- Forfeiture of vehicles used by convicted kerb crawlers
- Injunctions
- Anti Social Behaviour Orders
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC).

Whilst we acknowledge that ASBO's alone are somewhat limited in what they can achieve with prostitutes due to their failure to identify underlying causes of prostitution, we will ensure that, where used, they are supported by strong packages of wrap-around care and ..

- Use a range of Pre-charge diversion through cautions, conditional cautioning, drug testing and referral for treatment through the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP)
- Utilise voluntary referrals through outreach
- Use appropriate prosecution measures for women engaged in prostitution who have failed to take up the offer of support to move away from prostitution and continue to pursue criminal activities to acquire cash.
- Work with Police and support agencies to deliver effective interventions in tackling drug dealing and drug related crime
- Develop robust responses to intervene where individuals are being forced/co-erced into prostitution.
- Seek strong support from our partners to provide and sustain services that will continue to protect our communities from prostitution

We will also further develop our links with the Local Criminal Justice Board to further raise the awareness of the Crown Prosecution Service to the complexities of prostitution and the need to utilise all aspects of the Sexual Offences Act and the powers contained within it to support victims, deal positively with offenders and reassure communities of the level of seriousness with which prostitution is seen across our city.

## **Developing Routes Out**

The majority of women involved in street based prostitution in Leeds are identified as having substance misuse addiction and additional health related problems. Many will also have additional complex needs and issues such as homelessness, disrupted family lives, poverty, low educational attainment, experience of local authority care, experience of violence and abuse, serious physical and mental health problems.

It is essential therefore that Leeds further develops its existing range of holistic services in order to assist women to be able to successfully exit from prostitution. Current activities include housing support, specialist nurse provision and needle exchange. It is also essential to recognise that exiting can be a long and complex process often requiring long term support.

Evidence has shown that outreach is indispensable in providing support to women seeking to exit prostitution. Not only does outreach engage women with services but it allows them to develop trusting relationships to provide a solid basis from which more sensitive issues can be discussed and resolved in relation to their existing positions. Outreach can also act as a broker for mainstream services that have invariably become disengaged from the woman, such as a GP or benefits and housing. Modern outreach agencies invariably have adapted their service to provide one worker capable of dealing with all aspects of a wrap-around service and thereby enhancing confidence in their client.

Recent developments in Leeds to increase support options for women have included the introduction of a fortnightly multi agency case conference. The purpose of the case conference is to aid a co-ordinated approach to care planning in order that those engaged in street based sex working have increased opportunities to access appropriate services to;

- reduce harm caused to the individual's health and wellbeing and exit from street based prostitution.

Alongside this it also intends to disrupt and challenge illegal and anti-social street behaviour related to street based prostitution.

## **Harm Reduction**

Research evidence confirms that effective harm reduction strategies are one of the key motivators to engage drug misusers into treatment. It is imperative that Leeds has an effective harm reduction programme that runs alongside the Prostitution strategy for those women engaged in prostitution who use drugs.

The city also provides an expansive needle exchange programme and as stated above, a mobile outreach service to distribute sterile injecting equipment to women engaged in prostitution has been an integral part of Leeds harm reduction service for several years.

Further to the above, Leeds has recently established a dedicated medical service for women engaged in prostitution to enable them to obtain health advice, drug support

and counselling from a qualified GP and supporting team. It is envisaged that this philosophy will be expanded into the work of new and existing service providers in areas when prostitution is apparent.

Advice, information and prevention materials for women involved in prostitution, especially young people on issues such as drug misuse, sexual health and personal safety will be provided at contact points throughout the city.

Finally, we will continue to clear areas of discarded paraphernalia from sex activity and injecting through funding of public cleansing services

## **Drug Treatment**

With the obvious links between prostitution and drug use, the first steps on an exit route must look at ways to address the woman's drug use in a way that will allow her to improve her health and opportunities for work or skills improvement and maintaining stable accommodation .

In Leeds, the results obtained from drug testing have shown us that in excess of 90% of the street based women engaged in prostitution are Class A drug users with the majority using opiates and crack cocaine.

To address the problem in Leeds we must establish:

- Increased availability and accessibility to drug treatment services for those involved in street prostitution, including:-
  - protocols for fast-track into immediate assessment and treatment
  - female only provision
  - provision for pimp/partners
- Increased availability of diversion schemes linked to local support projects
- Increased closure of crack houses with links to local projects to support those who have been 'displaced'

The Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) has been developed to use contact between individuals and the criminal justice system as an opportunity to engage with them in a constructive way by assessing their needs and agreeing a care plan to provide appropriate treatment and support.

Currently in Leeds we are developing a dedicated drug treatment clinic for women sex workers and we have also allocated specific resources within the DIP to engage and support women.



## Housing

Homelessness or insecure housing is another key issue that must be addressed in order for a women to successfully exit from prostitution.

On a general basis being a woman engaged in prostitution should not be a reason to exclude women from the allocation of housing nor from homelessness services. However the successful placement of women previously engaged in prostitution and who have led a very chaotic lifestyle has often proved difficult both for the woman and those members of the community who have been housed in her close proximity. It is widely known from national research that instances have occurred where women who have been engaged as prostitutes have been excluded from a council's housing register on the basis that they have convictions or are subject to an anti-social behaviour order because of prostitution. Whilst placing someone on an ASBO may be an appropriate step to address such actions, our policy in Leeds will continue to be that it should never be an automatic assumption that this should preclude them from accessing social housing. It will always be important that any housing service takes positive action to assist this vulnerable group to address their support needs.

It is clearly important and understood that women engaged in prostitution and their support workers have a good understanding of their rights to apply for housing and will regularly challenge decisions that are perceived to be against their interests. A person can be treated as vulnerable and therefore in priority need to be rehoused for 'other special reasons' which may include aspects of confidentiality, protection etc. It should also be recognised that a person involved in prostitution may have a range of other support issues and needs, such as general offending, history of custody, drug use, and being subject to violence/abuse. In Leeds we will consider all these factors to determine whether a housing duty is owed on the basis of that individual's vulnerability.

Leeds City Council fully accepts that it has a legal duty to secure suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The council also has a duty to give housing advice to any person who requests it in order to assist that person to secure accommodation. Clearly the council will need to consider a persons experiences such as prostitution when they consider what type of temporary accommodation is suitable. The Leeds Supporting People team is aware of the needs of women engaged in prostitution and are commissioning housing support services to meet the needs of such vulnerable people.

Street sex workers may often have accommodation that they are at risk of losing due to issues such as violence and harassment. The council, similar to other areas across the country, is establishing a sanctuary scheme which will involve the installation of security measures to establish a safe room in the persons own home. It is clear that women previously engaged in prostitution may well benefit from this scheme which will prevent them, in certain circumstances, becoming homeless.

The council recognises that all households will require a housing option. There is no doubt that the contraction of the housing stock means it is increasingly difficult to access social housing in the city. The council has established a private sector letting

scheme which is often accessed by vulnerable households. This is an option which may be available for women engaged in prostitution. Increasingly the supporting people programme is commissioning floating housing support services for households living in private accommodation enabling them to receive the housing support that they require. Such support would help women engaged in prostitution not only access private housing options but also to sustain this accommodation.

### **Health Issues**

Studies have shown that women involved in street based prostitution can experience very poor physical and mental health. They are often not registered with a GP and have little access to health care provision. The research studies further confirm the links between women engaged in prostitution and their vulnerability to domestic violence and the long term impact in relation to their personal health and education.

Mental health is a further significant issue in a number of cases related to current, on-going or past experiences of abuse related to either drugs or violence. Women often present for health care with advanced medical conditions as they report a great reluctance to go to hospital sooner as they fear how they will be dealt with by staff.

The types of health needs can include; Wound Care, Nutrition, Chronic Diseases. Acute medical problems, Access to regular medication, Addiction Issues, Self Harm, Sexual Health – including contraception and cervical screening.

Currently Hep B vaccinations and a nurse clinic is provided on an outreach basis.

Through this strategy we must establish:

- Increased availability and accessibility to appropriate health care provision.
- Dedicated health care support for women engaged in prostitution.
- Increased awareness within mainstream health providers of issues faced by those engaged in prostitution.

### **Ensuring Justice**

Prosecution of individuals who exploit young people and groom them to be involved in prostitution and other allied activities are far and few. Information collected by projects supporting women involved in prostitution and young people at risk of being sexually exploited is currently not shared effectively between police divisions.

Through this strategy we must establish:

- Designated staff to proactively involve in preventive and investigative tasks
- Develop information sharing protocols among and between criminal justice agencies and voluntary sector organisations

## Safer Leeds Partnership

- Encourage and train all stakeholders to engage in identifying signs of risk among children and young people and in putting an initial response in place
- Develop multi-agency partnership working to ensure victims and survivors of sexual exploitation have equal opportunities to access justice

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