

**Prostitution in Leeds:
Preliminary Scoping Research**

Executive Summary

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Throughout 2013, agencies in Leeds developed a prostitution strategy for the city. This report was produced as part of the 'research and development strand' of this work and presents insights generated from a small-scale preliminary piece of scoping research which sought to gather available baseline data that could inform the strategy. The aim of conducting the research was to try to ensure that any co-ordinated response to sex work would be evidence-based. There are significant challenges involved in developing an evidence base around illicit and stigmatised activities such as sex work. Although significant gaps in knowledge emerged in relation to some areas, a range of useful insights were also generated and it is hoped that these initial scoping efforts may assist with identifying priority areas for future research and data gathering processes.

Researchers from the University of York sought to investigate what is currently known in relation to four key stakeholder groups in Leeds; sex workers, buyers of sex, local communities and agencies who are involved in providing interventions related to prostitution. Some of the most important findings of the scoping research were as follows:

- Very few local agencies had procedures in place to monitor the number of sex workers. Only four agencies who we contacted were able to provide accurate figures on the number of sex workers they were supporting.
- There was some evidence of an increase in indoor sex work. In January 2012 an internet search found 453 women advertising as selling sex to men in the Leeds area. A search on 30th July 2013 showed 678 women selling sex to men in the Leeds area, and increase of around 50%.
- Internet research showed a large and diverse indoor market. In July 2013, 241 males were advertising as selling sex to men, couples and women in the Leeds area, with 111 active in the last week. There were 37 transgender sex workers advertising on the main website for independent sex workers, with 13 active in the previous week.
- There was evidence of risky sexual practices amongst some indoor workers. 58/678 (9%) female sex workers advertising online offered unprotected penetrative sex, and 603/678 (88%) were advertising unprotected oral sex. There would appear to be gaps in sexual health service provision for sex workers.
- Although student sex work and trafficking were highlighted as 'issues' by a number of stakeholders, only one or two cases of each had been dealt with by agencies. Possible reasons for this are explored within the report.
- In terms of stakeholder's perceptions, it was widely considered that the most pertinent issues to sex workers were: drug/alcohol use, violence, sexual health, economic issues, child protection, physical and mental health, social exclusion, vulnerability and violence.
- The national 'Ugly mugs' scheme is a specialist third party reporting system coordinated by sex work projects to encourage sex workers to report crimes against

them. Data from this scheme revealed high levels of violence against sex workers in Leeds, most of which goes unreported to the police. From 67 incidents reported to Genesis via Ugly Mugs since 2011, only 7.7% (n=4) of sex workers gave consent to share full details to their local police force, where a full report of the incident is made. This is indicative of low levels of trust between sex workers and the police. West Yorkshire had the lowest percentage of sex worker consent to share full details nationally, across all 30 areas who participated in the National Ugly Mugs scheme during 2012/13.

- Ugly mugs reports showed that ‘group-based’ hate crime incidents were significant for sex workers, as well as violence from individual male clients.
- A range of voluntary and statutory agencies in Leeds are involved in delivering services to sex workers, with a variety of services and interventions provided. Broadly, these can be seen as falling into two categories, ‘support’ (therapeutic or practical help) or ‘enforcement’ (which involved disciplinary action against sex workers).
- There are relatively high levels of enforcement activity against sex workers in Leeds. Between 2006 and 2013, 20 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were served on street sex workers and in 2013 alone there were nearly 60 Home Office Cautions issued for prostitution. Figures show that women have in some cases been subject to repeat enforcement for prostitution-related activities, indicating potential limitations of enforcement actions as deterrents against sex work.
- Multi-agency working on prostitution in Leeds mainly involves enforcement agencies, via the Safer Leeds Case Conference meetings¹. In terms of agencies providing support-based interventions for sex workers, multi-agency involvement in sex worker support is more limited.
- A number of stakeholders reported that they wanted to be better informed of different types of sex work in order to be aware of the issues facing the various groups (see Fig.14). This suggested possible training needs around sex work in Leeds.

The report begins with an outline of the background and scope of the research. Following this, it focuses on sex workers and sex work in Leeds, summarising the information which was available in relation to this. It then provides an overview of prostitution-related interventions currently provided by agencies in Leeds. Available evidence about community views is then included, after which the small amount of evidence about buyers of sex in Leeds is reviewed. Finally, a summary of key findings is provided, with recommendations made for consideration by the Leeds Prostitution Strategic Partnership. Although the full report is not in the public domain as yet, we hope this will be available in due course.

¹ The forum has recently been reviewed and from January 2014 will be referred to as the ‘prostitution care planning group’.