

# Evaluation of the Leeds Street Sex Working Managed Area

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## Executive Summary

- From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014, the Leeds Strategic Prostitution Working Group were granted approval to initiate a 12 month pilot scheme of a Managed Area to address the issue of street sex work through a partnership model. Non-enforcement of the soliciting legislation was considered to be the driving principle of the scheme, along with sex worker safety and community harmony, after a decade of complaints, a failed cycle of sanction and enforcement focused policing, with poor relations between sex workers and the police and low levels amongst sex workers of reporting crimes committed against them to the police.
- The Managed Area consisted of a designated area of streets away from residential housing that centred around the business industrial area where street sex work already took place, with specific operational rules. The core rules were that the Managed Area operates from 7pm until 7am between those times there will be no cautions or arrest for loitering, soliciting or kerb-crawling. The area will be policed for the safety of sex workers and other laws will be enforced e.g. those relating to violent crime, robbery, sexual offences, public disorder. The Managed Area symbolized a model where sex workers were considered alongside the needs of residents. The Managed Area approach has meant that street sex work has returned to the political and multi-partnership agendas in Leeds with a positive, pragmatic, action focused way and fostered better community cohesion.
- The managed area is one element of a wider Safer Leeds strategy on street sex work and sex work more widely for Leeds including the establishment of a police sex work liaison officer role to encourage reporting of crimes by sex workers and support the investigation of these, enhancing intelligence pathways for ugly mugs intelligence and improved access to support services for sex workers
- A key outcome has been improved relationships between sex workers and the police, due to both the policy on none arresting and particularly the role of the Sex Work Liaison Officer dedicated to the protection of sex workers. There have been reduced enforcement activities in the whole area as the police focus on welfare and protection based policing. However, sex workers felt there has been a reduction in police presence generally in the MA leading to less improvements in feelings about safety as fear of crime and violence remain high.
- The second main outcome has been significant evidence of increased Ugly Mug reporting: A year on under the pilot scheme, 2014/2015, there has been a significant increase in reporting. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 up until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, 73 reports had been taken by Basis Sex Work Project (formerly Genesis) of which only 4% were not shared at all. A further 46% were shared anonymously and an increase to 50% were reported with full details to the police. In first quarter of 2015/2016 100% of ugly mugs reports made were formally reported to the police.
- The third positive outcome has been that outreach workers from across the third sector and statutory services evaluated that there was increased access to women by outreach services and higher take up of social and health care interventions. This was supported by sex workers

interviewed who confirmed they engaged with outreach in the MA more frequently than previously. The Sex Work Liaison Officer acted as an excellent communication point for messages to be given to women who are transient and difficult to contact. Prior to the MA Basis Sex Work Project were already aware of, and flagging up to commissioners and multi-agency partners new and additional needs of migrant sex workers, which were not being fully met. The MA had led to a greater awareness by other services of the emergent needs of migrant women in street sex work.

- There has have been reduced complaints from residents and overall a more positive attitude from the local community as nuisance has been significantly reduced. Practitioners felt that there had been an improved understanding in the community about street sex work.
- There was broadly support for the new approach from businesses in order to reduce the levels of sex work in the daytime, and minimize the impact on their businesses.
- Litter remains a persistent problem for some local businesses.
- Many sex workers were concerned about litter in the MA and were concerned about this as a broader community issue. Most sex workers had sensible practices for removing waste. Yet there was a real need for more bins and places to dispose of waste in the MA as well as improved street cleansing, particularly in hot spot littering areas identified .
- The majority of women accepted the parameters of the rules agreeing with the need to keep the residential spaces free as a fair compromise. The women were well aware of the 7-7 rules and despite knowing this was not flexible some were working out of these hours slightly in order to work in the daylight or make the money they needed. Working only in the dark presented problems for some women in relation to the fear of crime and getting home safely.
- Where warnings were issued to sex workers for working outside the rules these generally were being responded to well.
- The regulations were difficult for some women to adhere to, particularly the night time working because of safety concerns and/or commitments to family. Sex workers, in smaller numbers, were continuing to work outside the MA hours and spaces. Competition between women and certain groups of women was attributed to the space of the MA being relatively small. Unlike some managed area models on continental Europe the MA did not include a designated safe space where women could take clients to safely do business.
- The MA approach took away the fear of arrest from the police, leaving the women to concentrate on getting business in the safest way.
- The managed area sent the message to customers that the police were there not to arrest the women but to ensure their safety and that customers were being observed.
- Some practitioners felt that an unintended consequence of the MA was that strategic planning focus had been on female street sex work with male sex work more marginal in multi-agency strategic development to date. Also where there is dispersal of street sex work to other areas this was less of a priority for police and services.

- Amongst sex workers there was not a sense that the Managed Area had improved safety for the street sex workers as fear of crime persisted. Individuals are actively finding spaces within the Managed Area where they feel safer because of the physicality of lighting and people presence.
- From all stakeholders there was overwhelming support that the MA stayed with further work on the operations of the model and enhanced resourcing to address the gaps, unintended consequences and safety concerns.

Future improvements should focus on the safety of sex workers including:

- Increase police presence, policing for sex worker safety, during the operating hours to decrease fear of crime.
- CCTV and public street lighting to address safety concerns for sex workers and broader community.
- Improving the physical spaces to design out violence.
- Consider the place where the sexual transaction happens as the place where there is most risk for sex workers. This place is not addressed in the current Managed Area model.
- A strategic plan that is resourced to address littering issues for the broader community.
- Revisit the Managed Area space and streets to address over-crowding
- and competition.
- Rules revisited to consider an earlier starting time or possible daytime space away from businesses. Later start would be difficult for the women.
- Proper appropriate funding for outreach sex worker support and fast tracked systems to improve access to interventions and provide 7 nights a week outreach. Also need for a wider review of funding for sex work support in the city to ensure quality follow on health, social care and exit support pathways are in place.
- To harness the success of the provision of service interventions within the Managed Area there should be consideration of a mobile unit to provide toilet facilities and more detailed interventions such as health screenings.

## **Recommendations**

- Decisions about the future of the Managed Area should be evidence based measured against the agreed outcomes.
- Sex Work Liaison Officer is a key role within the operation of the Managed Area and supports the sex workers irrespective of whether the MA exists. Hence this role needs to be retained.

- The perceived decrease in police presence during the operational hours is a concern and has contributed to sex workers not experiencing an increase in feeling safer. Hence the police with partners should explore strategies to increase patrolling of the MA.
- Revisit the regulations of the Managed Area – including the times, the streets particularly considering an earlier start and a possible space for daytime working as this will persist for a small number of women. Any move to push the starting time back from 7pm to later would cause significant problems for the women, many of whom are making a compromise by starting at 7pm already.
- Consideration about the physical environment in which the Managed Area is located and making improvement to these that would enhance safety for sex workers and businesses in the area– improving, street lighting, making waste ground spaces less intimidating by fencing, improving CCTV etc.
- The Managed Area is providing a climate where sex workers are much more likely to engage in outreach for longer periods of time. For instance currently work is being carried out between PASH and Forward Leeds who work with Basis Sex Work Project. This trend needs to be supported to provide the space for longer interventions (such as health screenings) within the Manage Area which could be housed within a mobile unit. The benefits of a mobile unit are that it is not visible in the daytime and can be moved if the Managed Area is re-located.
- Develop a specific action plan to minimize litter including toilet facilities, bins and more regular street cleaning services.
- Ongoing sharing of information about the Managed Area to new sex workers and those who work sporadically, are from other areas, or where English is not their first language.
- Review of funding for sex work support projects in Leeds, fast tracking services and other established good practice approaches to mainstream services for early access to interventions. Ideally funding should be sought to increase outreach to 7 nights a week and for additional adult sex worker outreach specialists to directly case work and follow support and advocacy work. Assessment of whether funding is adequate should consider level of needs in Leeds and comparison with investment in other towns & cities.
- The most notable time of risk for sex workers is away from the Managed Area where they are alone engaged in the transaction. Currently the Leeds model does not address this element of street commercial sex and it should be considered in future enhancements as a priority to prevent crimes.