

Ipswich Prostitution Strategy – 2007-2012
Domestic Violence issues

The prostitution strategy action plan focuses on five areas in relation to street sex work:

Gathering intelligence

Understanding who is involved in this area, including the women themselves, the men involved with the women, and the kerb crawlers.

Developing routes out

Working with women who work or have worked or may work on the streets in order to assist them to stop working on the streets, or to prevent them from going back to working on the streets or entering sex work. Issues include homelessness, lack of benefits, childcare issues and domestic violence all of which are being worked with.

Many women were homeless when they were first in contact with services and we have housed 7 women in tenancies with two more about to be housed. We have also assisted women into temporary accommodation. We are providing support in order to stabilise their lives alongside other agencies such as Community Drugs Team, Coastal Housing Group, Icení, Health Outreach Service, Ipswich Borough Council and others.

Domestic Abuse and Violence is a big issue in terms of preventing women from exiting sex work. There is a strong link between the women and drug suppliers, who are often coercive in terms of wanting the women to earn money through selling sex, and/or drugs. Some of the women owe money to drug suppliers for their own drugs, and this is used to force women to continue. A few of the women are working from telephones, although they are not on the street, and a couple of women have been using their new accommodation to drug deal and sell sex. Two of the women are being evicted from tenancies which we obtained for them as a direct result of coercive relationships. This has been demonstrated when the partners of two of the women went to prison, when they wanted help. When the men returned we found it difficult to contact them, because the men often take their phones.

Another example of coercion, is a woman who is living with an ex-client. She has no income of her own, and he pays for her drug prescription, and her food. She has been a virtual prisoner. We are currently assisting her to leave. He is not violent, but it is an abusive situation.

Finding safe housing is very difficult for this client group, as most women's refuges do not accept women who are on drugs or methadone and are sex workers. Ipswich Refuge have agreed to assess their needs, and would move them out of the area, but there are few places which will take them. In any case, the women are too scared to report the men, some of whom are the fathers of their children.

We attend MARAC to keep them up-to-date with these situations, and providing a 'Freedom' programme for clients of probation and the Streetfree project.

Tackling Demand

137 kerb crawlers have been arrested and the last one was arrested some six weeks ago. The probation officer in the multi-agency team is risk-assessing the men, and if necessary providing a programme for them.

Prevention

The multi-agency team is working closely with Children and Young People's services in order to support workers to identify children under 18 who may be or are vulnerable to abuse through sexual exploitation. A new Safeguarding Protocol was launched in January 2008 and multi-agency training has been rolled out around the county. This part of the strategy covers the whole county. There are currently coordinators/champions in each Area, but a full-time worker is being sought to work within the multi-agency team to promote good practice.

Community Intelligence

The Strategy is working closely with the residents of the area of activity. Meetings take place every three months, and on the whole residents are supportive of the Strategy.

Helen Hepburn

7th July 2008