1. I am making this submission on behalf of Groundlevel Churches UK. I am the Parliamentary Liaison Officer for the organisation. Groundlevel Churches UK is a mainstream Christian organisation which represents around 10,000 people in over 80 churches throughout the country.

2. Groundlevel would support the recommendation made by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade that the “burden of criminality should weigh heaviest on those who purchase sex – who create demand – and not on those who provide sexual services”.

3. It is submitted that this would have the effect of reducing demand. The current law has failed to do that. Section 14 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 was an attempt to reduce demand by making it illegal to purchase sex from someone who has been coerced. Evidence to the All Party Group showed that this was difficult to enforce, and the Group reported that this was “an insufficient measure for protecting victims because coercion is too difficult to prove. There are inadequate deterrents for ... those driving demand for the sex trade. This promotes the UK as a lucrative destination for trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation”. No prosecutions under Section 14 were made in the year 2013-14 according to the CPS. This speaks for itself does it not?

4. For the majority of people in prostitution, there is evidence to show that it is damaging to them and that they are exploited. Those who enter prostitution very often come from unstable backgrounds of life in care homes, sexual abuse, homelessness or substance abuse and so are vulnerable anyway. It is not simply a matter of choice of lifestyle with most prostitutes.

5. Violence is never far away and 61% of prostitutes in London have reported being subject to violence. The National Crime Agency has reported that the most common form of exploitation for people trafficked into the UK is sexual exploitation. Demand for prostitutes feeds this exploitation of already vulnerable people.

6. Evidence from research in Scandinavia shows that criminalising the purchase of sex has led to a decrease in prostitution, has had a deterrent effect on people trafficking and also has had a deterrent effect on men purchasing sex.
This “Nordic” approach has spread out from Scandinavia and is gaining support. It is an offence to buy sex in Canada and Northern Ireland. The Irish Republic currently has a similar law before its Parliament and the Lithuanian Parliament has endorsed the principle. In 2014 The European Parliament and The Council of Europe passed resolutions endorsing the criminalisation of the purchase of sex. This, they said, was aimed at combatting exploitation, and, since the majority of prostitutes are women, it was aimed at improving gender equality. This was a point also made by the All Party Group in its report.

7. The All Party Group also made the point that leaving prostitution is very difficult. The report says, “... many submissions highlighted that women face multiple barriers to exiting prostitution....” Examples include the fear of prosecution which prevents sex workers from accessing support services; fines for selling sexual services which often results in selling more sexual services to pay the fine; “criminal convictions frequently prevent women in prostitution from finding alternative employment”.

8. We submit that the burden of criminality should shift from the seller of sex to the purchaser of sex, so we urge the Committee to make it a criminal offence to pay for sexual services.

9. We urge the Committee to recognise that the demand for prostitution feeds the exploitation of vulnerable people.

10. We would urge the Committee also to recommend that more services should be available to help people exit prostitution.

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