Written evidence submitted by Rooms of our Own

Rooms of our Own is a social enterprise seeking to create sustainable and affordable spaces for women’s organisations in a climate which is antithetical to funding feminist issues.

Since our establishment in 2012 we have spoken to scores of women’s organisations. We have attended hundreds of events, organised a number of events ourselves and listened to a whole range of views on prostitution (amongst other issues). We have spoken with supporters of prostitution as a “job like any other”. We have listened to prostitutes claiming that they will be safer if the whole industry is de-criminalised. After much research and analysis we have reached the following conclusions.

1. **We will never have gender equality so long as men are able to buy women.** Being able to purchase the simulacrum of love and affection combined with the performance of all kinds of sexual acts inevitably perverts the way men view women. Let us use the analogy of black slavery. White men gained huge financial and other profit from being able to purchase their black fellow humans and constructed an entire philosophy of inferiority to justify their actions. The results of this philosophy can still be seen in the racism endemic in American society today [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07183xh](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07183xh). Similarly allowing men to buy women results in institutional sexism, even amongst men who do not use prostitutes. Imagine a senior woman executive having a meeting with a male colleague who has just visited a prostitute in his lunch hour. Having forced the prostitute to carry out all his wishes and in general behave like a willing slave, how can he possibly interact on an equal basis with his work colleague?

2. **Prostitution is not a joyful free choice.** The fact that money changes hands demonstrates absolutely that the prostitute is NOT carrying out sexual acts because she wants to.

3. **Prostitution is not a career.** Is there ANYONE who honestly thinks that they would love their daughter to grow up to be a prostitute? That prostitution is equivalent to working in a shop? Or an office? Or as a doctor? Or as an MP?

4. **Women end up in prostitution.** There may be a tiny number of Belle du Jours who think they can make a load of money by selling their bodies. However even these women usually end up numbing themselves with drugs and/or alcohol and suffering from all kinds of mental distress vide [http://www.amazon.co.uk/BEING-BOUGHT-KAJSA-EKIS-EKMAN/dp/1742198767](http://www.amazon.co.uk/BEING-BOUGHT-KAJSA-EKIS-EKMAN/dp/1742198767). The vast majority of prostitutes are forced into it by economic necessity, violent boyfriends, drug dependence, trafficking etc. 85% of prostitutes report a history of sexual abuse in childhood. Society is finally coming to realise that child abuse is a terrible evil, but is not following this through to what happens to the adults.

5. **Prostitution is dangerous.** Prostitutes have a mortality rate 40 times higher than the national average. This is due to drugs, drink, violent pimps, violent clients, suicide; a whole range of reasons directly related to their lifestyle.

6. **We do not support criminalising women.** We do not think that the women should be criminalised. They should be helped to exit prostitution, a road that
has been made much more difficult by government cuts and the loss of so many organisations that would assist women in this regard.

7. **We support criminalising demand.** We think that the moguls of the sex industry, the pimps, the clients should definitely be criminalised. We support the Nordic model:–
http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic_Model_EN.pdf We need to recognise the structural, economic, psychological and physical violence and inequality inherent in prostitution. We should only criminalise the perpetrators, i.e. the sex buyers.

8. **We should not let ECP and similar organisations have the floor.** As a society we do not think that only people who have been burgled have the right to talk about burglary, or that only women who have suffered domestic violence should be allowed to rule on what happens to violent men. As a society we take a view on the morality of burglary and DV. In fact we often assume that victims are LESS likely to be able to articulate against perpetrators. Similarly many prostitutes are far too traumatised to speak out against their oppression. As a society we should oppose prostitution as an archaic evil.

9. **We support the Brussel’s Call** http://www.womenlobby.org/-news-about-the-brussels-call?-lang=en