Written evidence submitted by J Thomas

I am writing in a personal capacity, as a concerned individual but primarily as a mother of teenage girls growing up in England.

I would like England and Wales to adopt the ‘Nordic Model’ and illegalise the purchase of sex, following the example of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Canada, Northern Ireland and possibly soon France.

The sex trade is a threat to all women and girls

The priority consideration for this inquiry should be for the safety of women in the trade, and but I hope that the safety of all women and girls will also be considered when addressing legislation options.

Poverty and Debt

The growing demand for prostitution services in the UK and the attempt by the sex trade to normalise it, is a threat to all young women. As women face increasing debt from university fees, welfare cuts and continued unequal pay, prostitution becomes a depressing option.

Prostitution is not safe work

Women in prostitution suffer poor health, violence, addiction and psychological damage. There is no evidence that legalised brothels or pimping protect women from this: it simply adds to the number of women in the trade. There is evidence from Germany that legalisation has increased extreme and violent sex services on offer, and post-traumatic stress disorder is as high amongst prostitutes as amongst serving soldiers. It has not stopped sex services being provided without condoms and services without their use are openly advertised.

The Nordic Model works

The Nordic Model works by reducing demand. There is evidence that since its introduction in Sweden in 1999 the numbers of men buying sex has dropped from 12% to 6% and women in prostitution has halved. Whereas in Germany where the sex trade was decriminalised it has xxx

The sex trade argues that the Nordic model makes women in the trade less safe. The evidence is quite the opposite. No prostitute has been killed in Sweden since the introduction of the sex buyers’ laws, and the legislation allows women to access service and the police without fear of prosecution. The sex trade doesn’t like the Nordic model not because it makes women less safe as they argue but because it reduces their profits. Bodies such as the International Union of Sex workers or the English collective of prostitutes purport to represent sex workers whereas in fact they represent the profit makers and owners of the trade.

Women’s safety is threatened where prostitution thrives

As a young woman I was accosted by punters in London -including during the day and in the West End. The men were often unpleasant and intimidating. The move to set up legalised zones in parts of the UK is a retrograde step and in practice intimidates women and children from living and visiting
the area. In parts of the Netherlands the impact of open prostitution has been a ‘gender-fication’ of areas where women and families move out and only single men live.

**Prostitution undermines respect for women**

The open sale of women as bodies for sexual pleasure undermines equality and messages of consent. The main cause of sexual violence and abuse is a man’s attitude and belief in the worth of women. The relegation of women to a commodity to be enjoyed without any care for her feelings or impact on her health is dehumanising to all women and girls and ultimately dangerous. It has no place in a modern egalitarian society.

**Wives and Partners are the unforgotten victims of a prostitution culture**

In the UK we are fortunate in living in a culture where few men buy sex – research suggests it is around 10%. However whenever the sex trade is legalised particularly where brothels are legalised, increasing numbers of men use it. In Germany around 60% of men are now thought to regularly pay for sex and this figure has increased rapidly since decriminalisation. The majority of men who visit prostitutes are in relationships, and the unforgotten victims of the trade are wives, girlfriends and children at home, who have an increased risk of exposure to diseases including STDs but also other diseases such as flu and TB. In addition of course they suffer the emotional trauma of adulterous partners. Women in prostitution cultures such as Germany and Spain are in affect disempowered in their relationships and live with the emotional insecurity of knowing that multiple infidelities in brothels are likely. This in turn puts pressure on women to provide sex and types of sex in relationships and indirectly compete with prostitutes. This is a continuous pressure during child bearing and rearing years, middle and old age and during illness.

**Rotherham and Rochester Illustrate abuse can look consensual**

The sex trade argues that women should be allowed to choose to sell sex, but the reality is that women who end up in the trade do so because of lack of choices and the trade grooms and chooses them rather than the other way round. Rotherham has illustrated clearly that behaviour that looks consensual from the outside is in fact abuse. It is appallingly easy for girls from any background to be controlled by pimps through fear and psychological manipulation. We know too much about how sexual abuse works now to continue to turn a blind eye to the sex trade and pretend that it is primarily consensual. The experiences in Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand illustrate that decriminalisation encourages a culture where more men pay for sex and therefore more women and girls have to found to work. There are simply not enough women in the world that would willingly have sex with numerous strangers each day, so various methods of coercion and manipulation are necessary in a prostitution culture. The more men pay for sex the more women and girls are open to abuse.

**The UK is a sitting target for pimps and traffickers as countries round us close down the trade.**

As other countries around England and Wales illegalise the purchase of sex we become sitting targets for the pimps who will see us as a country where there are still rich pickings. There is evidence that pimps have moved from Northern to the Republic of Ireland, and to England and Scotland following the sex buyers’ laws introduction in Northern Ireland. If we do nothing we will be
left with the traffickers and pimps and the drug trade which follows on behind from this. This makes all women and girls in this country less safe.

As a mother I want a country where my daughters are safe, and equal and the legalised purchase of sex is incompatible with this.