The Managed Approach to sex working on streets – Leeds District

A new approach

The development of the managed approach in Leeds has come about due to decades of street sex working within a highly residential area of Leeds. Intensive resourcing of enforcement action for many years continually appeared to fail to break the cycle of offending and whilst both sex workers and kerb crawlers were targeted in equal numbers, the issue and complaints around the nuisance which street sex working causes continued.

The managed approach innovation has been led largely by residents groups and locally elected council members who were desperate to tackle this on-going issue with new and alternative tactics. The City had a well-established multi agency partnership which sought the opportunity to tackle on-street prostitution in a new way and with a changed focus. After multiple visits to other local authority and Force areas to see models of best practice and in liaison with ACPO and the National Ugly Mugs Scheme, the Cities Community Safety Partnership sought to support and lead on the implementation of a new approach. The overarching aim being to facilitate sex workers to exit street sex working.

From 1st October 2014, the Leeds Strategic Prostitution Group were granted approval to initiate a 12 month pilot scheme of a Managed Approach 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 confidence 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.

A managed approach

The Managed Approach consists of a designated area of streets away from residential housing that centred on the business industrial area where street sex work already took place, with specific operational rules. The core rules were that the Designated 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 reassurance of sex workers and other laws will be enforced e.g. those relating to violent crime, robbery, sexual offences, public disorder. The Managed Approach symbolized a model where sex workers were considered alongside the needs of residents and businesses.

The rules of the managed approach were agreed between key stakeholder groups, namely the sex workers, the residents and the businesses and are critical to the success of the scheme as they seek to minimise the nuisance which street sex working creates for these groups, whilst services worked to facilitate sex workers exiting sex work.

Managed Approach Rules:

- **Working on the streets outside the agreed area will not be tolerated and enforcement will follow**
- **The area is active after 7pm and until 7am. Working in the area outside these times will not be tolerated and enforcement action will follow**
- **People should not litter the area with debris such as condoms/wrapping/syringes or any other litter**
- **People using the area should respect business and other properties. No debris should be left and if any damage is caused the law will be enforced**
- **Crime, public disorder and anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated in the area and action will be taken by the police**
- **Working outside or disrupting buildings that are open for business will not be tolerated**
- **No drug use is allowed in the area**
- **People using the area should not commit crime against others in the area**
- **Police officers will regularly patrol the area. They will do this in the interests of public safety to protect people in the area, to identify, investigate and respond to any harassment, exploitation or crimes committed against sex workers or others in the area**
- **Police officers will patrol the area to monitor that the agreed rules are being adhered to**
The managed approach 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.

From the outset of the pilot, clear objectives were set which would be used to understand if the implementation of the approach could be built upon. These objectives were:

Objectives of the pilot:

- Increase in the number of Ugly Mug reports taken with full details to be shared with police
- Increase in the number of crimes against sex workers investigated by West Yorkshire Police
- Increase in the number of women reporting coercive and exploitative individuals to the police and projects
- Decrease in the number of women working in the residential area not within the specified area
- Increase take up of outreach support interventions
- Increased referrals to support health, welfare and exit interventions/services
- Reduction in resident complaints about street sex work in residential areas
- Decrease in daytime sex working
- Monitoring of any displacement to any other locations which street sex work has not recently taken place

The pilot has clearly shown that it has an achieved a number of its objectives. Reporting of incidents, confidence in the police and an increase in access to services are all evident. Complaints in the residential areas have decreased to the lowest amount recorded and daytime sex working is reported less frequently.

Consultation

In Leeds the approach to consultation was led by locally elected members, local policing officers and key stakeholder groups. Consultation was critical to ensure that local representatives owned the pilot and it was not seen as something imposed. The pilot was discussed at multiple forums and community committee meetings. There was an elected members group established specifically on the back of this initiative, and a multi-agency Operational Group, oversaw the initial implementation. The results of the pilot were presented to the Safer Leeds Executive and was supported and continued after October 2014.

Outcomes of the pilot

The pilot has seen a hugely improved relationship and confidence between police and sex workers. As a result, there has been significant increase in reporting of offences to police. In the first quarter of 2015/16 100% of reports to Ugly Mugs were reported to police. In 2015 we also saw the first convictions of 8 and 10 years of 2 offenders for rape of sex workers in Leeds, directly reported by sex workers from the specified area.

Outreach workers are also reporting increases in take up of social and health care intervention services. The Sex Work Liaison Officer has acted as an essential communication and has identified a whole cohort of migrant sex workers who were not visible to services prior to the pilot.

A recent crime profile of the area since the managed approach was piloted has seen interesting results. Calls for commercial and nuisance related incidents have reduced as has overall crime in the area. There has been an increase levels of reported violence relating to sex workers as victims and a significant decrease of anti-social behaviour and non-alcohol related incidents. It is clear that some displacement of crime has also happened in adjacent areas.

Related incidents

In December 2015 we had the tragic murder of a sex worker in the specified area, Daria Pionko. Dario’s murder follows a national trend of Eastern European workers who are more likely to be a victim of this crime type than their white British equivalent. Leeds has not known a sex worker murdered since 2004, Lyndsey Bourne, a female taken from the City Centre of Leeds and murdered.

Since December 2015 there has also been significant media coverage of the managed approach in Leeds. In January we saw huge coverage of the area and consequently, reporting has at times miss-represented the approach and failed to cover the positive outcomes. The casualty of the reporting has been an upsurge in opposition to the
approach by local businesses. They view the local area as highly damaged by the publicity and are seeking to actively challenge its validity and outcomes.

There is on-going discussions with local businesses who have responded very vociferously to the media coverage and currently we are enhancing the operational delivery plan to try and mitigate perceived difficulties resulting due to the approach. The media have maintained their significant reporting of the new approach and we continue to try and work with businesses to address local issues in their area. This is the single biggest challenge at present.

Next Steps

During the pilot phase of the managed approach there was an academic evaluation undertaken. The focus of this report was mainly around the sex workers. The report was helpful to identify successes and challenges. Whilst overall, sex workers were supportive of the pilot continuing, they fed back concerns around safety and night time working.

We are now in a period where we are seeking to evaluate the managed approach across all areas and agree how we take the learning and results from the pilot forward. We have agreed to review the evidence of the on-going approach in April 16 with a view to agreeing a refreshed strategic prostitution strategy for the City.