During my early to mid-twenties I worked as a ‘call girl’ in London. I did not enjoy selling sex. It was a traumatic experience and I suffered being raped by a client more than once. It is painful to relive these memories and this time in my life, however, as well as providing this written evidence, I would also like to give oral evidence, because it is important that women selling sex today:

a) are able to leave prostitution should they want to
b) are offered support and services when seeking to exit the sex trade
c) are not hindered from exiting prostitution due to criminal charges from prostitution-related offences preventing them obtaining work outside the sex trade
d) are able to work together for safety purposes, not criminalised for doing so and forced by the law - as they are currently - to work alone which makes them more likely to suffer violence
e) are able to screen clients as much as possible both on-street and off-street
f) are able to turn to police if they are the victims of crime
g) are not made easy targets for criminals by the law, which, with the exception of Merseyside, is the case currently across England and Wales

1. Whether criminal sanction in relation to prostitution should continue to fall more heavily on those who sell sex, rather than those who buy it.

No, the criminal sanction should not continue to fall more heavily on those who sell sex, but neither should a criminal sanction fall on those who buy sex from a consenting adult.

Decriminalisation, which is the prostitution law in New Zealand, is the safest legal model for sex workers. It distinguishes paid for sex between consenting adults from abuse and exploitation. While improving working conditions by allowing sex workers to work together for safety, it is also shown to make leaving the sex trade easier for those seeking to exit.

It is criminal itself that any criminal sanction is made against people selling sex. Most who do so are women and the majority are single mothers selling sex as their only means of providing food for their children and a roof over their heads. A fairer benefits system is what is required so that these women are not driven to sell sex to survive. Criminal sanctions against them only serve to trap them in the sex trade as once they have received a conviction it is very hard, if not impossible, to secure a job outside the sex trade.
Although criminalising people who buy sex may at first appear a sensible solution, where it has been implemented, for example in Sweden, the lives of sex workers have been made more dangerous. Prostitution has been forced underground and in fact, indoor prostitution in Stockholm has increased according to the Swedish National Police Board. Sex workers in Sweden are not reporting crimes against them to the police, they are unable to screen clients properly due to the law deterring clients giving sex workers identifying information, they can be evicted from their homes if they are found to be selling sex, and the stigma against them has increased and as a result they suffer prejudice, including from health and social services and can face losing custody of their children.

2. What the implications are for prostitution-related offences of the Crown Prosecution Service's recognition of prostitution as violence against women.

The CPS policy results in sex workers being arrested for working together in order to increase their safety as they are charged with brothel keeping. Having a criminal conviction then makes it harder to secure employment when people want to leave the sex trade. In addition, fines made by the courts can generally only be paid by sex workers by them selling their sexual labour. So the government is receiving proceeds from prostitution, which at the same time they claim is 'violence against women'.

3. What impact the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has had to date on trafficking for purposes of prostitution, what further action is planned, and how effectively the impact is being measured.

The Modern Slavery Act covers all types of trafficking such as forced labour and domestic servitude. Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is a small fraction of trafficking as a whole. By combining the issues of consenting paid for sex between adults and trafficking, both trafficking victims and sex workers suffer as neither of their needs and protection of the law can be met by the same legal solution, neither does protection of trafficking victims need to come at a cost of protecting the rights and safety of sex workers.

4. Whether further measures are necessary, including legal reforms, to:

   a. Assist those involved in prostitution to exit from it

Services and support, which are non-judgmental and non-religious, to help people seeking to exit the sex trade should be invested in. These should include but not be limited to: help with housing, debt management, career advice, training and further education, counselling, access to drug and alcohol treatment. It is imperative that these services are offered without
conditions such as the insistence of ceasing sex work, which is likely to be the person’s only form of income.

b. Increase the extent to which exploiters are held to account

In order to increase the extent to which exploiters are held to account investment in police resources is required. Instead of diverting police resources away from sex traffickers and rapists and policing consenting adults involved in paid for sexual transactions, it would be far better that police time and resources are used investigating sex trafficking and imprisoning sex traffickers and the rapists of both sex trafficking victims and sex workers.

To do this, it is essential there is a clear distinction, as there is with the New Zealand prostitution law, between paid for consenting sex between adults and rape and abuse. I know all too well sadly the difference between these. If there is no difference recognised in the law, how can a sex worker report being raped to police when all prostitution is considered ‘violence against women’? And how likely is it that a rapist will be sentenced to prison for raping a sex worker?

Legal reform in this area is urgently required. Until it occurs, sex workers will continue to be made easy targets for criminals by the law as it stands and exploiters continue to evade the law. Decriminalising consenting paid for sex between adults, as it is in New Zealand, is needed here in England and Wales. Decriminalisation is supported by Amnesty International as well as the World Health Organization, UN Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, and Human Rights Watch among other organisations.

In addition, the model of policing prostitution in Merseyside (known as the Merseyside model or hate-crime model), which treats crimes against sex workers as hate-crimes and is proven to dramatically increase the extent to which exploiters are held accountable, should be implemented across all police forces in England and Wales as ACPO recommended many years ago. As no other police forces have taken this initiative themselves, and because no other strand of hate-crime is ‘optional’ for police forces to adopt, this measure needs to be made in law. If the government is serious about increasing the extent to which exploiters are held to account, it will make this legal reform.

c. Discourage demand which drives commercial sexual exploitation

The reality is that prostitution is not driven by those seeking to purchase sex, but by those selling sex due to their need to earn money. If the disparity in pay for women is addressed in the job market and the benefit system changed to ensure no women are living in poverty, then prostitution will decrease.