



## Home Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: Prostitution, HC 756

Tuesday 1 March 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 March 2016

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mr Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, James Berry, Mr David Burrowes, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Tim Loughton, Stuart C. McDonald, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 1 - 143

#### Examination of Witness

*Witnesses:* **Kat Banyard**, Co-director UK Feminista and spokesperson for the End Demand campaign, **Mia de Faoite**, and **Laura Lee**, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** Could I call the Committee to order and could I refer everyone present to the Register of Members' Interests, where the interests of members of this Committee are noted? This is the first panel in the Committee's new inquiry into prostitution that was suggested by Mr Burrowes. Can I welcome our witnesses, Ms de Faoite, Ms Banyard and Ms Lee? Thank you very much for coming. You are the first panel and, therefore, some of the evidence that you give to us today may well end up being put to other witnesses, and if there are issues that you wish to raise after your evidence session we would be glad if you could write to us with any further information. We have had over 250 separate pieces of evidence, so this is an inquiry that has attracted a lot of written evidence. Obviously, we cannot have everyone to give oral evidence but we are most grateful to all of you for coming.

Can I start with a question—rather a dramatic question—to you, Laura Lee? Do you believe that we should change the law on prostitution? Do you think it is ready to be changed?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, I do believe that the law on prostitution should be changed, but perhaps not in the manner in which the Committee is considering it at present. As sex workers, we are seeking the right to work together for safety and in doing so to increase our labour rights as workers as well. At present the sex industry is the only industry in the UK that I can think of that compels me, as a woman, to work alone and leaves me wide open to attack from predators and attackers. I speak from 22 years of experience across a vast range of activities within the sex industry, from on-street selling to webcam work to lap dancing to escorting.

**Q2 Chair:** Just to be clear, we do not have any preconceived views as to what we wish to do with the law on prostitution. The point is, no matter what you have read about or seen in Twitter, or social media, we really do not have any views on this yet and that is why we have oral and written witnesses to help us come to a view, so it is an open book at the moment and a blank page, we are ready to hear arguments. Ms Banyard, the current law—is it working, should it be changed? I just want the main principles as to what you think the situation is.

**Kat Banyard:** I think there is wide consensus that current prostitution laws are not working. This was certainly the finding of the All Party Parliamentary Group in 2014, which found that the laws send very mixed messages. We have a lot of confusion when it comes to a ground level as to what the police should do, whether support services should be provided. We know that the CPS already addresses prostitution within its violence against women framework, and that is also the case for the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and the Scottish Government, who all recognise that prostitution is one form of violence against women. But the problem is our laws do not yet reflect that because at present, overwhelmingly, the burden of criminality falls on those who sell sex and I think we are all agreed that that is wrong. Women who are exploited through prostitution should not be punished for it. Nobody selling sex should be criminalised for it, but what we need to do as a society is send a message to the minority of men in this country, because most men do not pay for sex, that it is not an acceptable way to treat another person and we know that the threat of criminal sanctions are a key method for discouraging paying for sex.

**Q3 Chair:** Thank you. Ms de Faoite, what is your view on this?

**Mia de Faoite:** I worked in prostitution for six years. I fully support the sex buyer law. As Kat said, the current law as it is—more or less the same as it is in the Republic—is not working. The sex buyer law is the only thing that will stop the trafficking. Europe has a horrendous human trafficking situation at the moment. We can blame the pimps and the traffickers but as long as we do nothing to cut off what makes them exist in the first place then the traffic will continue. I think the sex buyer law shifts accountability onto the people that rightly deserve and need to take responsibility for the role and the part they play in a trade that is intrinsically harmful and corrupt.

I cannot justify anything I witnessed in six years, the rape and violence is horrendous. My own experience: three rapes, a gang rape that happened inside. My friend did not survive. I cannot fathom how any Government would sanction an industry like that. I was beaten and abused and raped by buyers. Removing them or making them a smaller amount—do you know what I mean?—does not make it more dangerous.

**Q4 Chair:** Yes. Laura Lee, what is wrong—and I am not saying I support this view, I am putting this to you—with two consenting adults being able to come to an arrangement, such as a prostitute would have with someone who is involved with her? What role does the state have in this if the human trafficking element is removed and coercion is removed?

**Laura Lee:** It is my view that when two consenting adults come together behind closed door then the state does not have a right or a role to intervene. The state should intervene when harm occurs, and we can debate harm all day. I should just say at this point that I witnessed firsthand, while I was working on the street, the effects of further

criminalisation in 1993. Precious police resources were driven away from looking after us to chasing down our clients and the levels of violence against sex workers went through the roof. I would not be doing my industry any favours or doing the right thing if I were not to bring that to your attention that further criminalisation places us in huge danger.

**Q5 Chair:** Yes. Ms de Faoite, that is right, isn't it, if there are consenting adults there is no violence, no coercion? What is wrong with people being able to do this? Why does the state have a role?

**Mia de Faoite:** If the state believes that consent to bodily invading another human being can actually be purchased, like you would purchase any other commodity—for me personally I do not believe anyone has the right to buy another human being, and that should be enshrined in law regardless. There is no way to reduce the harm because you will always be on your own with the person who has bought you. There is no way to judge or predict what way they will react because you have been bought. Sometimes when you buy something and you take it home and it doesn't work the first thing you do is you shake it. You paid good money for this. The same principle applies in prostitution and there is no way of ever knowing when that will happen.

**Q6 Chair:** Kat Banyard, you were described by *The Guardian* in 2010 as the most influential young feminist in the country. What do you say to those young girls, those young students, who have signed up to the website SeekingArrangement, a quarter of a million of them who have registered and are seeking to find people, older, richer men, to help to fund their university studies? This is a website that is currently in existence where over a quarter of a million young students, describing themselves as “sugar babies”, are offering themselves for sex in exchange for money to help fund their education.

**Kat Banyard:** I think the law needs to send out a message to every single woman and girl in this country, if they find themselves in the situation in which they are sexually exploited, that they are not to blame, that the law will not punish them. That is the situation at the present. It is overwhelmingly women who are punished for being sexually exploited.

With regards to the role of the state, the state has a role to protect the most vulnerable people in our society. The research that has been done of people who are in prostitution has shown—and this was from a Home Office report—that approximately 50% of women in prostitution became involved when they were children. It began as child sexual exploitation and it continued. We also know that there are a host of other vulnerabilities that mark an entrance into prostitution, including having spent time in care, having been subject to violence and other sexual abuse. Now, of those who experience vulnerabilities and harm as a result of prostitution, they happen to constitute the vast majority of people involved in prostitution and the state has a responsibility to them.

**Q7 Chair:** Yes, but, in respect of this particular website, these are all adults who have gone on this website offering their services. Do you think it should be closed down or do you understand why people are doing this?

**Kat Banyard:** It is the job of the police. The point about bringing in a sex buyer law, where you completely decriminalise sex—

**Q8 Chair:** No, we know what the job of the police is. I am asking you as someone who is known for their trenchant views on these issues, is it okay to have websites like this?

**Kat Banyard:** It is not a website that I have come across myself, but we know that sexual exploitation is a huge problem in this country and that women often feel coerced or pressured into putting themselves in that situation, but the people responsible are the buyers, the sex buyers.

**Q9 Chair:** Sure. You have said that and you have said it very eloquently. Laura Lee, what about this particular website, young students, a quarter of a million of them, known as “sugar babies” offering themselves in exchange for funding at a university. Is it perfectly fine if they do this with consent on either side?

**Laura Lee:** Each woman has agency to make her own decisions and stand on her own two feet. What I think we need to realise in this debate is that nobody acknowledges that there aren’t vulnerable women within the industry. That’s a fact. However the state’s role is to protect those women in their chosen roles, so if they choose to sell sex they should be allowed to do so in safety and they should be given the freedom to leave and the freedom to work in safety as well.

**Q10 Chair:** Ms de Faoite, presumably you would like to see this website closed down, would you?

**Mia de Faoite:** I have a daughter myself just entered college, and money is tight and so on as a student, but if my daughter went to look at these then the question, you might say, well, something has gone wrong if a young woman is putting—you know there is such severe risk. This law lays down a very firm foundation that we are not for sale, any woman in university, whatever, because the only thing that separates us in this room, women, and the women for sale today is circumstances and they can change because while we are still for sale that is how it filters through. It filters through into our universities and so on.

**Q11 Chair:** Of course. Let me ask you this final question before I go to Mr Burrowes. It is estimated that 50% of the sex workers in the United Kingdom at the moment are from Eastern Europe. Do you have any other figures? Obviously we have the police coming in later and we will put these figures to them. Is that your understanding that half of the sex workers in the United Kingdom come from Eastern Europe?

**Laura Lee:** I am sorry, is that a question to me?

**Chair:** Yes, Laura Lee.

**Laura Lee:** Okay.

**Chair:** If you know. If you don’t know that is fine, just say you don’t know.

**Laura Lee:** No, it is fine. Dr Nick Mai did a study in 2009 on 100 migrant workers. I think the debate around this so called sex buyer law has been very much muddled with conflating trafficking and migrant sex workers. So, yes, the industry is awash with migrant sex workers and that is simply because it is a buoyant industry, so what you have is mothers coming to the UK earning money and sending it back home to their children and

to feed their families. As a policy, what I believe we should be doing is acknowledging the driving forces that push these women into prostitution in the first place—so, that is, looking at poverty, looking at drug addiction and looking at benefit cuts, but targeting the industry is not the way to help these women.

**Q12 Chair:** Yes. Kat Banyard, do you recognise those figures, the 15% figure I gave you or do you have other figures to give the Committee?

**Kat Banyard:** It is not a figure I have come across. The reality with prostitution is that at the moment it is a relatively secretive trade, but we do know that people involved in prostitution overwhelmingly have suffered vulnerabilities before their involvement. We have a huge problem of sex trafficking into this country. We need to make the UK as hostile a place as possible for pimps and traffickers, because we know—international research has shown—that countries in which the prostitution trade is legal experience higher rates of trafficking into those countries. That has been shown by international studies.

**Q13 Chair:** Yes, we are coming onto trafficking very shortly. Finally, I should put the question to you, the figures I gave that half of those sex workers are from abroad, in particular from Eastern Europe, do you recognise those figures, Ms de Faoite, or not?

**Mia de Faoite:** I do not know them specifically but at home, in the Republic of Ireland, it would be staggeringly higher. It is about 90% of the women involved in prostitution at home are from the developing Eastern Europe countries.

**Chair:** Ninety per cent?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, 90%. There are very few Irish women left in prostitution at home, coming from poor areas, disadvantaged and so on, but you don't solve poverty by exploiting the poor. I would like to say also that for the last 18 months of my time on the street, I stood alongside a trafficked woman and, although we arrived there through different circumstances, what connected us is that we were both bought, used, raped and so on, humiliated, by the same people. That is what connects us, the buyers. Nobody can separate that anywhere, anytime, in any country. They are what connect us.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Q14 Mr Burrowes:** Just following on the issue around trafficking, Ms Lee, you gave evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly back in January 2014. You said that in all your time working as a sex worker, which was for over 20 years, “I’ve never come across a woman whom I would have deemed to have been coerced or trafficked in any way”.

**Laura Lee:** That is correct.

**Q15 Mr Burrowes:** Do you maintain that view?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, absolutely, and I think that what you need to understand is that in some respects we are a very self-regulatory industry, so that if we came across a woman who was coerced or trafficked that would not be tolerated, not for one second. Neither would

under age. I certainly would report that and I know many of my colleagues would do the same.

**Q16 Mr Burrowes:** Just following on from that evidence, Ms Banyard, in terms of that response, how would you take that view, in relation to the view that in 20 years, “I’ve never come across a woman whom I would have deemed to have been coerced or trafficked in any way”?

**Kat Banyard:** Well, of course, I cannot comment on someone else’s experience.

**Mr Burrowes:** No.

**Kat Banyard:** But we do know that the UK has a serious problem of sex trafficking. It is estimated to be worth at least £130 million annually to the women’s abusers. Now the only reason women are trafficked into this country is because the traffickers know that at the end of the line there are men who are willing and wanting to pay for sex. The only reason it takes place is because those men are willing to hand over money. Now we as a society need to send out a message to say, “It is not okay to pay for sex. It is not okay to treat another person like that”, and by bringing in a law that makes it a criminal offence to pay for sex, but decriminalises selling sex, we draw that line in the sand as a society and come together and say, “This is not the way that women and men can live as equals. We will not stand by while a minority of men sexually exploit predominantly vulnerable women and girls. We will take action”.

**Q17 Mr Burrowes:** Ms Lee talks about her experience, but what is your experience? You have mentioned it before but do you take issue then in relation to the supposed lack of evidence of any coercion or trafficking of women in your experience?

**Mia de Faoite:** In the Republic, most prostitution is run by criminal gangs. The guards testified at our own Justice Committee that they estimate 45 criminal gangs are now running prostitution rackets across the Republic and into Northern Ireland. When Northern Ireland changed its law of course they moved south and the women for sale they increased on our side of the border. It was up by 80%. So they moved to where it is legal to buy. The trafficked women can be hard to reach because they are scared. The police are not always the first people that they trust. There was a young woman from Romania who was working and she was very distressed and my friend said, “Just leave, just go”, and she said, “I can’t go. I’ve a 14 year-old sister at home and if I leave this apartment they’re going to take her”. Now whether they do or whether they were going to fulfil that threat, it does not matter. The fact that she is under that means that they are hard to reach. The same way the woman I knew was under his control for 12 years. His control was all that she knew. It was trauma bonding, similar to Stockholm syndrome. The one time I did challenge him he beat her and sent her down to me to send me a clear message of what would happen, so she defended him and it took a lot of intervention from social workers and so on to break that bond.

**Q18 Mr Burrowes:** In terms of under 18s, we heard the Home Office evidence in 2014 that 50% of prostitutes are under the age of 18—they come into prostitution under the age of 18—and by law in this country that is classified as exploitation. Do you accept that it is exploitation?



**Laura Lee:** Obviously, any woman, man or child entering under age is—pure and simple—exploitation. That 50% statistic is not one I am familiar with. It certainly would not tally with other studies that I am familiar with, and not with my personal experience either.

**Q19 Mr Burrowes:** Do you accept the current position and that it is a valid law to classify prostitution in relation to someone under the age of 18 as being exploitation?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, I do and I think, just to add to that, if we are looking at the sex buyer law or changing the laws in and around sex work, I think what we need to bear in mind is that trafficking is already an offence, rape is already an offence, so is sex with a minor or kidnapping or any of the activities that you can think that are associated around the sex buyer law. The sex buyer law does nothing else but target consenting adults, and it does not decriminalise us as sex workers either. That is a falsehood.

**Q20 Mr Burrowes:** If we accept that there has been exploitation, that a child entering into prostitution has been exploited, how do they suddenly, magically at the age of 18 not become a coerced, exploited individual?

**Laura Lee:** I do not dispute that for a minute—that somebody flicks a magic switch and that everything is made okay at 18—

**Q21 Mr Burrowes:** You said there is no evidence you have of any coercion in any way in relation to women throughout the 20 years that you—

**Laura Lee:** I said that I had never come across anybody that would be deemed a victim of coercion. They were women who made the decision themselves to enter the sex industry. There was one—

**Q22 Mr Burrowes:** Have you come across any women who have come into the industry before the age of 18?

**Laura Lee:** No, I haven't. I have never come across anybody who came in under age.

**Q23 Mr Burrowes:** So you completely dispute the figures from the Home Office that 50% of women do come into prostitution under the age of 18?

**Laura Lee:** I would like to—

**Chair:** Mr Burrowes, 50% of sex workers were from Eastern Europe.

**Mr Burrowes:** No, the separate evidence from 2014.

**Chair:** Right.

**Q24 Mr Burrowes:** I will just bring in the other witnesses as well on this issue. Currently the law is that it is classified as exploitation for those under the age of 18 who enter into prostitution. First of all, do you see how that law is working out, how it is being enforced and how that reflects on whether there is a need for change in the law to introduce a sex buyer law?

**Kat Banyard:** There is increasing awareness of the scale of child sexual exploitation in this country, but at the moment we are still seeing these issues as two separate issues. We have child sexual exploitation there, trafficking over there, prostitution here but, as Mia was pointing out, what unites this triangle is the sex buyers, the demand that underpins all commercial sexually exploitation. Without it it could not function. Also, as you were raising the issue of when so many of the women in prostitution have become involved as children, we are clearly looking at a trade that is inherently exploitative, dangerous and harmful, and we need to not just wash our hands of people when they reach the age of 18. Once involved in prostitution it can be extremely difficult to exit, and that is why the provision of support services and exit services are so critical. But at the moment the level of provision of support service is incredibly patchy.

There was a commission that undertook research last year that looked at the level of support services and found it wanting, to put it mildly. The reality is our laws are sending out a mixed message or a confusing message. On one hand you have the CPS saying, “Well, this is violence against women so of course we need to support women to exit” and yet the law still gives the police the powers that many use to put those women in prison for their involvement in it, and yet, as a form of violence, there is no law against perpetrating it. There is no law against paying for sex. So it does not make sense, and that is one of the reasons why we see such poor coverage of support and exiting services. That has to change and that needs leadership, and the most fundamental way that we can provide that leadership is through the law.

**Q25 Mr Burrowes:** In terms of the current situation and whether any changes in the law would provide greater protection, the Home Office looked at it in 2014 and they referenced that 70% of prostitutes had had a background of an abusive environment, of child abuse. Is that your assessment and what difference would a change of law make in terms of providing protection for what would seem to be inherently vulnerable people?

**Mia de Faoite:** For myself, most of the women I stood alongside—some 18, 19—I could not tell you for sure what age they entered but they were quite young. Many had had violent experiences at home with men and so on—homeless or in care, addiction, second generation addicts. Life had not been good for so many and, yes, many were previously sexually abused as children as I was myself, but if you had said to me at 33 when I went out there, “Had that anything to do with it?”, I would have told you, no, that I thought that was dealt with. That wasn’t. Maybe something broke in me when I was seven and eight, do you know, and maybe it was in there and maybe it was easier for me to cross that line into prostitution because my body subconsciously was already used to being invaded, so maybe you didn’t buy a 35 year-old, maybe you bought an eight year-old reliving something she can’t make sense of.

**Q26 Mr Burrowes:** In terms of the voice of prostitutes, for this Committee to be able to understand what the voice is and what the impact would be of any changes to the law, you refer, Ms Lee, to your industry. Who are you speaking on behalf of? Are you speaking on behalf of yourself individually, or is the industry yourself and others who are working for these managers, pimps, promoters of prostitution? Who is your industry that you think you are speaking on behalf of?



**Laura Lee:** I speak for myself as an independent sex worker, but also for the very many sex workers who write to me every single day thanking me for my efforts in trying to promote safer working environments for us.

**Q27 Mr Burrowes:** You say that you have a particular interest in this issue because you are challenging the Northern Ireland Assembly in relation to their sex buyer law.

**Laura Lee:** Yes.

**Q28 Mr Burrowes:** You have asked for funding for that and that funding has come from where?

**Laura Lee:** It has come from a variety of sources, mainly from other sex workers I am happy to say.

**Q29 Mr Burrowes:** But also I understand in terms of the crowd funding website you have, you have been given £1,000 by Escort Ireland, which markets thousands of women each year and designs websites for escorts. Is that right?

**Laura Lee:** That is correct. That is because a lot of the sex workers that advertise on their website put pressure on them to support me and said it was only fair, since they make money from the industry, that they should support my efforts of keeping our industry safe.

**Q30 Mr Burrowes:** What is the view of the wider industry, which no doubt probably does include managers and promoters of prostitution? What would their view be in relation to having a sex buyer law? Perhaps we can ask that question across the panel.

**Laura Lee:** I am not here to represent managers or anybody else. I am here to represent on the ground current sex workers, and I can tell you that our view is that we deserve the right to work in safety and that the current laws are putting us in danger every single day.

**Q31 Mr Burrowes:** Perhaps, in response if you could say who you are representing to be able to put forward this view.

**Kat Banyard:** Sure. I am Co-director of UK Feminista. UK Feminista was involved in setting up the End Demand campaign in 2014. It is a campaign that is supported by over 40 organisations, including Women's Aid, the End Violence Against Women Coalition, the Fawcett Society, Unison and a host of other service providers, including St Mungo's who work with vulnerable women and sometimes homeless women.

On the issue of whose interests are at stake, I think that is a critical question. When we are addressing these issues, just as so often we leave out the sex buyer who remains in the shadows, we also forget who makes the money in the sex industry. It is not women standing on the street corner. It is the pimps. It is the brothel owners and it is the traffickers. A few make a lot from the sex trade. The sex buyer law will not be good for pimps and brothel keepers and traffickers. It will bust their business model. They do not want it, which is precisely why we need it.

**Q32 Mr Burrowes:** Do you want to add anything further? You don't have to. Do you want to add anything more? You don't have to. It is a matter for you.

**Mia de Faoite:** Who I represent is a number of survivors. It is rising voices and survivor groups and so on. I work alongside in the TORL campaign in Ireland, Ruhama, which is the main organisation. Nearly 300 women last year availed of their services and so on. So it would be a combination of all of that. Like I said, I stayed on the street because you go indoors and you are under someone else's control and that is just—

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Q33 Nusrat Ghani:** You mentioned that the links are the buyers. I am struggling to understand how the buyers of sex or the pimps would be concerned by another piece of legislation if they are already involved in a number of other criminal activities. You mentioned a lot of it is through organised crime. In reality how would it affect all these organised criminals, who are already—

**Mia de Faoite:** How would it affect the criminals, the pimps?

**Nusrat Ghani:** Yes.

**Mia de Faoite:** Well, they make money. Where does the money come from? The money comes from the buyers who can sell a woman's body over and over and over again—

**Q34 Nusrat Ghani:** How does it stop the buyers because they are already involved in an activity that they are not going to be talking about publicly? I do not see how—

**Mia de Faoite:** Who, the buyers?

**Nusrat Ghani:** The buyers and—

**Mia de Faoite:** Oh, well, because if they are arrested and fined well then you put them at the severe risk of bringing what they do in the dark into who they are in the day. I spent six years in the company of these men and that is one big deterrent.

**Q35 Nusrat Ghani:** How will they be arrested? Who will report them to get them arrested?

**Mia de Faoite:** Well, the police.

**Q36 Nusrat Ghani:** Who will report them as buyers? Will the onus be on the person that is trading sex, the sex worker, will they then have to report?

**Mia de Faoite:** No, no, no, the law works in that prostitution will always have a face or a domain to advertise from. It cannot exist on the ground and the police find the women in the same way the buyers do, and if the buyers can find the women then so can the police. It is not rocket science. Then when they know the apartment or the street or whatever then they arrest the buyers. In Sweden they approach them and most of them—about 80%—put their hands up and say, “Yes, I was. I did. I am about to and I will pay my fine,” because otherwise they risk going to court and it is public. They are treated like any other—

**Q37 Nusrat Ghani:** You mentioned Sweden. How many of those that put their hands up would then reoffend?

**Mia de Faoite:** I do not know the exact number. I know when we were in Sweden they have a number of people who do reoffend. There are a number of buyers who have issues. Nobody has been in prison but they have upped it to 12 months now, so they are looking at the reoffenders. They are also looking at why they are reoffending as in the psychological issue behind these men, and offering support in that way.

**Q38 Nusrat Ghani:** In the model you referred to of Sweden, are the sex workers under pressure to give evidence against these buyers of sex? I am worried they might be made more vulnerable.

**Mia de Faoite:** No, no, no. Anybody selling sex in Sweden—and soon Ireland will adopt it, our general election messed it up—will never be criminalised in any way whatsoever. So, no, they don't have that. They can work together. They can work three in a room, four in a room. You will not be charged with any crime whatsoever.

**Q39 Nusrat Ghani:** Thank you. Ms Laura Lee, you were shaking your head there, I assume that you disagree?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, certainly. This is a common misconception that is pushed by people who would favour the sex buyer law that sex workers will be decriminalised with any forthcoming change, which targets buyers. That is not true. We are not fully decriminalised until we are allowed to work together in safety. We are just over another horrific murder in Aberdeen where the lady concerned did not even feel able to contact the police. She phoned her friends and by the time they found her it was too late. She was working alone. She was vulnerable. Understand that the people who come to attack us are not clients. They are attackers and they single us out because they know we are vulnerable, we are alone, we are very possibly carrying cash and that needs to stop. We need the right to work in safety.

**Nusrat Ghani:** Ms Banyard?

**Kat Banyard:** The point about the sex buyer law is it not only criminalises paying for sex but it does decriminalise people who sell sex. That is the principle of the law.

**Q40 Nusrat Ghani:** Ms Laura Lee just said that isn't the case.

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, because you do not have it here yet.

**Kat Banyard:** At the moment, yes. The problem is that women can be criminalised at the moment. We agree we want to change that. We want women to be completely decriminalised because no one should be punished for being exploited.

**Q41 Nusrat Ghani:** I have a report here from the Metropolitan Police Commissioner on the possibility of changing the law and, in relation to the sex buyer proposal, his view was that, "If you have an illegal transaction then there must be two parties to that illegal transaction".

**Mia de Faoite:** That came up at home as well and the Chair of our Justice Committee brought it to Europe and looked at it. No, it is not unequal to charge one with a criminal offence if you can prove that the one that is a weaker party. The European Parliament have already agreed that prostitution is both a violation, or whatever—you wouldn't know the parts. No, it does not break any equality or whatever. You can criminalise one side and not the other if you can prove that the other side is the more vulnerable.

**Q42 James Berry:** It is very interesting to hear the divergence of views, which I think reflects the debate in the public. Some people think prostitution should be banned entirely, whether that is criminalising the men, the women or both, and others think that there should be a freedom to sell and buy sex if you wish to but, in that situation, you need to do something with the law to protect women from the terrible abuse that you very frankly described. What I am interested in is the cases at the edges. You mentioned, Ms Lee, webcams where, as far as I am aware, there is no risk of violence, there is no physical contact with the buyer. Do the witnesses think that amounts to exploitation? Would you seek any more regulation of that area? Secondly, what about, say, people with disabilities? I saw a documentary a little while ago about someone with a disability, I think, going to Amsterdam to have sex for the first time because they were not able to find a sexual partner due to their disability. Do you think it is reasonable to try to restrict that or make that unlawful? Maybe Ms Lee first and we will go down.

**Laura Lee:** No, I do not think it is reasonable to make that unlawful. As a matter of fact, in the Netherlands the Government pay for sex workers to train on the job. If I had my way, we would be paid by the NHS. They are paid to train on the job and to look after disabled clients and to afford them the same opportunities. This isn't about a sense of a man's entitlement. It is about allowing consenting adults to get on with whatever they choose to do, so, yes, I would be very much against any further measures against that.

With regards to webcamming and phone sex as well, that is becoming quite big especially among the student population. It is a very popular way of helping. Again, do we stop that by making it illegal to go on webcam or sell phone sex? No. We look at why students are having to resort to that in the first place.

**Kat Banyard:** The issue of what would this law take in comes down to whether or not a person has attempted to directly pay for a sex act and, in the countries and jurisdictions that have adopted it, that is generally meant to infer that it involves direct contact, but countries that have adopted this law have found ways to apply it and apply it successfully. First adopted in Sweden, it led to a 50% reduction in street prostitution, with no evidence that it was just displaced. It also transformed attitudes and that is what is at the heart of this law. It is not about chalking up arrest after arrest. It is about sending out a message in order to prevent this from occurring in the first place.

**Q43 James Berry:** Okay, but your campaign is called End Demand, so I suppose in the ideal world there would be no prostitution because there would be no demand and, therefore, there would be no risk to women from prostitution, if I am right. But then what happens about the scenario with the disabled potential client that I just mentioned?

**Kat Banyard:** I think there are many disabled people who would find that a very insulting suggestion that people with disabilities do not have sex lives. Also that, if we recognise

that this is a form of violence against women, nobody has a right to commit sexual exploitation, okay.

**Q44 James Berry:** I am not trying to insult disabled people. I do not think that is an appropriate response really. I am referring to a programme where absolutely this has happened and, taking the comments Ms Lee has made, I am asking if there is someone who is disabled or anyone who cannot have a sexual relationship without paying for it, if you wanted to, as you say, end demand what do you think those people's views would be on it? I personally do not take a view, I just want to know where you see those people, people who are not trying to abuse prostitutes but who cannot have a normal sex life without paying for it.

**Kat Banyard:** Prostitution is a form of violence against women, as the Crown Prosecution Service already recognises in the way it is dealt with. There are no exceptions. Can violence against women be perpetrated in particular scenarios? No. As a society we have to say there is no scenario in which sexual exploitation is okay and we have to send a clear message about that.

**James Berry:** Fair enough.

**Chair:** Let me reiterate, Mr Berry was not suggesting that was his view, he was just putting to you a view that he wanted a comment on.

**Mia de Faoite:** In the six years I only met one person who was disabled. I would have the same view about access to the female body for sex, there is no human right to access sex and for that group of people who do say—and I am aware that they do say that—maybe there is another industry that they should avail of and that is the therapeutic one, but the female body should never be used as some sort of a therapeutic device for those with issues, so no I don't take that—

**Q45 James Berry:** That is fine, so a blanket ban even if it covers some more difficult cases?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes.

**James Berry:** Fair enough. Thank you very much, that is helpful.

**Q46 Nusrat Ghani:** Ms Banyard, you said that in Sweden that 50% of prostitution disappeared or was removed.

**Kat Banyard:** Street prostitution.

**Q47 Nusrat Ghani:** From the street. Earlier on we had some stats. They do not relate. Maybe we can just make an assumption that 50% of people who enter prostitution did so as a child or 50% of people in prostitution are from Eastern Europe or trafficked. Where have the other 50% gone? These are vulnerable people who have been possibly trafficked by organised criminals. The fact that they might have just shut up shop and not done anything else I find quite hard to believe. My concern is that they are driven even further underground and are made even more vulnerable and can access even fewer health services and maybe become victims of other violence. Ms Banyard, where are the other 50%?

**Kat Banyard:** The evaluation that was commissioned by the Swedish Government found that that reduction was not offset, so women were not just displaced to other areas. Because the point about this legal framework is that it is not just about criminalising paying for sex and, that is it, you walk away. It must be accompanied by the provision of support and exiting services, so it goes hand in hand with supporting women to find alternatives, to access treatment such as rehab and other forms of support services.

**Q48 Nusrat Ghani:** If 50% of women were then treated through a programme that would be very hard to do.

**Kat Banyard:** That is not what I am suggesting, but that there was a 50% reduction—this is the findings of the Swedish Government—and that they have in place a system of support to help women to exit. We have examples from here in the UK that show that there is an assumption that underpins it that prostitution is somehow inevitable, that the sex buyers will always be there, that they will just keep going along the road until they find somebody, that there will always be women standing on that street corner. That is simply not the case and it is an incredibly defeatist approach to this form of sexual exploitation.

**Chair:** That is very helpful. We will come back to more questions on this.

**Q49 Mr Umunna:** Is it Ms Faoite?

**Mia de Faoite:** De Faoite.

**Mr Umunna:** De Faoite. I have the same problems with the pronunciation of my name by other people, I am sorry. Also, Ms Lee, you have both through your testimony and what we know, have had experience yourselves in sex work and, Ms Banyard, I do not think you have according to your biography. Do I take it that all three of you currently have been working with other people, not necessarily yourselves but working with women who are in prostitution now? Is that part of your work? Have you all had experience of that? Obviously you work alongside people maybe in that, Ms Lee?

**Laura Lee:** Yes.

**Mr Umunna:** Ms Banyard, have you worked with prostitutes at a local level?

**Kat Banyard:** The End Demand campaign involves organisations that deliver support services.

**Mr Umunna:** Yes, but I am asking—sorry to cut you off, but I do not have that much time—have you yourself worked with prostitutes?

**Kat Banyard:** I work with women with involvement in prostitution.

**Mr Umunna:** Right, and Ms de Faoite, you have as well?

**Mia de Faoite:** I work alongside the frontline services, yes.

**Q50 Mr Umunna:** Can I ask each of you, therefore, in terms of the women that you have come across—and obviously there are various different types of sex work—and in terms



of prostitution what percentage of the women that each of you have come across have a substance abuse issue or a drug habit? What percentage would you say? I will start with you again.

**Mia de Faoite:** My own experience on the street was that I only ever met one woman that did not have a drug or—with the older women it tends to be alcohol. The younger ones it could be crack, polysubstance abuse, but all of us had some apart from one.

**Kat Banyard:** The research that has been conducted of women in street prostitution has found that over 90% of the women are addicted to drugs.

**Mr Umunna:** Yes. Ms Lee?

**Laura Lee:** It depends what level you are talking about, certainly at street level substance abuse and alcohol abuse was quite high. At the various other levels through the industry it tends to peter out a little. I would say it is no more prevalent in our industry than in other high pressure industries.

**Q51 Mr Umunna:** The reason I ask is because it seems to me that, particularly, drug misuse is the big elephant in the room and you are the only one, Ms Lee, who has mentioned that substantially in the evidence that you have given. For context and for the record, I grew up in my constituency and I grew up in a part of Streatham where prostitution and kerb crawling was rife. On my way to school and on my way back from school occasionally the prostitutes in the area would speak to me, and so many of the women on our streets clearly had substance misuse issues, which was connected to—we had pimps arguing on our road over women and always drugs were in the background. I suppose my question to each of you would be: what can we do about that and these substance misuse issues that the girls have? Because I understand and I am quite sympathetic to Ms Banyard's very strong argument for the law to tackle the demand side of this, but in terms of women going into this activity there is a strong, strong connection with drug misuse and I am just wondering what it is we need to do about that if we are to stop them entering into these activities in the first place. I get the point that Ms Banyard has made about compulsion, but what can we do about the drug misuse issue?

**Laura Lee:** When you have a woman who is trying to support her family very possibly labouring under a drug misuse problem as well, and very possibly pimped and on the street and so on—and I am taking absolute worst case scenario—the very last thing that any Government should look to do is, first, make those circumstances far more dangerous for her and, secondly, to take away her income because that might be the last beacon of hope that she has. Criminalising the buyers, or indeed the sellers, pushes those women away from the help they so desperately need.

**Kat Banyard:** The issue about how we support women with addictions is a complex picture because the assumption is often that the drug addiction comes first and then the prostitution, but that is not necessarily the case. There was one fascinating study that looked at the economics of prostitution to look at what financial impact it has on an individual being in prostitution. It actually found that women pay a lifetime price for it because it has a lifetime impact on their earnings, even when they get out of prostitution and there are lots of outgrowths. What they found was that an addiction certainly was not the case in the majority of cases for women who were entering prostitution—it certainly was not the reason they were entering prostitution—but when they came out the majority

did have an addiction. The researchers found, the way it was described—and they summarised it as a coping mechanism—essentially that women are often found to be self-medicating while in prostitution in order to endure the prostitution.

**Q52 Mr Umunna:** Is that right, Ms de Faoite, because you have given some very candid testimony of your own experience in that respect? What is your take?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes. I went into prostitution. I thought it was a rational decision at the time but you don't make them when you are addicted to a mind altering substance. I thought it would be for a few months and it would pay for my habit and at the start it does what it says on the tin, it does pay but you are disconnected from society in general, and that first time something broke inside me that I had no experience of and so on and then the violence and to my gang rape. I was only on the Burlington Road five months when that night happened and, after that night, I no longer saw the world the same way and my drug use increased. It went from one bag a day to two bags a day. It literally kept me numb, chilled.

**Q53 Mr Umunna:** Have you found that—I accept the point Ms Banyard makes about cause and effect—in terms of women exiting this activity that them being weaned off the substance is an important part of helping to take them away from that activity?

**Mia de Faoite:** Absolutely. I was taken from the street by a social worker who got to know me over six weeks because we don't tend to trust the outside world, so she took her time and after about six weeks I did trust her and I let her in. She made the choices. She made the phone calls. She made the arrangements because I couldn't see the choices. She could. I just couldn't. So my first step was a medical detox for heroin for three weeks and then I went to further rehab for another five weeks, so I was eight weeks in medical and then the therapeutic part and then I worked for four and a half months with a clinical psychologist. So, yes, tackling addiction, yes, detox and that comes in with the exit.

**Mr Umunna:** I am pleased you got off the addiction. I am pleased you are where you are.

**Mia de Faoite:** Thank you so much.

**Q54 Mr Umunna:** Ms Lee, can I ask you one final question before I get cut off Jeremy Paxman-style by our Chair?

**Laura Lee:** Sure.

**Mr Umunna:** Can I be completely upfront and honest with you?

**Laura Lee:** Of course.

**Mr Umunna:** I think the weakest point in the evidence you have just given us is your continued reference to the word “harm”: the state should only intervene when harm is involved, is what you said.

**Laura Lee:** Yes.

**Q55 Mr Umunna:** Why I think this is weak—and I would be interested to get your take on this—is because harm comes in different forms and it isn't just physical harm, clearly, it is a mental thing and I think we just got that from Ms de Faoite when you were explaining your experience. How do you define "harm" and how can you measure, particularly, the mental health consequences of so many of the women who enter into this and maybe come out hopefully later on? How do you measure that? How do we define harm?

**Laura Lee:** Harm is very subjective, isn't it, and it is down to the—

**Mr Umunna:** Hence my question.

**Laura Lee:** Yes, and it is down to the individual I think. What I would say is in terms of decreasing harm, if you speak to women who are working in prostitution in countries where the clients are criminalised now, the harm by anyone's definition towards them has only increased manifold, in terms of their state of mind, their safety at work, their relationships with the police, their relationships with exit services as well. So, regardless of how we define harm, it is there for anyone to see in further criminalised environments.

**Q56 Mr Umunna:** But you talked about how you don't see why the state should be able to intervene when two consenting adults have agreed to something. Now, Ms de Faoite, you just explained when you went through what you went through and question: do you see yourself as having consented in that instance and, secondly, in spite of the fact you consented do you believe it did you harm?

**Mia de Faoite:** That night or prostitution in general?

**Mr Umunna:** Well, just that as an example. You get what I am doing here?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes.

**Mr Umunna:** I am taking Ms Lee's definition. Do you have—

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, like I say, I was only a few months on the street at the time when I made that decision to go that night. There were two of us. The young woman I knew very well, a couple of the men would have been familiar to her and it was a Christmas do and we went to an apartment hotel, a kind of fancy place, and it was their Christmas and we were paid a large sum each and so I did sort of feel, "This is what we do. This is what we don't do" and so on but something changed that night.

**Q57 Mr Umunna:** I suppose the point is: would you have said that you consented to what was going on at that point?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, I didn't have a gun to my head but I also had heroin in my system and I was disconnected—

**Mr Umunna:** Did it do you harm?

**Mia de Faoite:** Did it do me harm? Yes.

**Mr Umunna:** It might not have done you—I don't know, you didn't mention violence in that situation.

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, it was.

**Mr Umunna:** But did you—

**Mia de Faoite:** Well, I left that building, yes, smelling of urine and my face was a slightly different colour and bleeding from certain places so, yes, most definitely but the physical stuff healed, do you know?

**Mr Umunna:** But the mental—

**Mia de Faoite:** It is the other stuff.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr Umunna:** That is the point. Thank you, Chair, and thanks for answering that.

**Chair:** Just for the record, Mr Umunna, when you say the word “final question” that means it is your last question.

**Mr Umunna:** I know, sorry, Chair.

**Q58 Tim Loughton:** Can we talk about enforcement and obviously, with the increasing use of online and availability of sex workers using the internet so that the risks of being street workers are no longer there, do you think it will become, therefore, harder to control prostitution through legislation because of the technology effectively?

**Kat Banyard:** The reports of the jurisdictions that enforce this are that it is a straightforward law to enforce. That was certainly the message that we got from the police in Sweden when we went to visit agencies involved in it. People seem to assume that the internet somehow makes it more difficult to enforce a sex buyer law, but the point is about how it functions. The police look at the same online adverts that sex buyers look at in order to locate it. The whole point is that prostitution hinges on the sex buyer locating and finding the women, so whether it be via the internet, via a card in a phone booth or a newspaper, the same adverts designed for sex buyers can be read by the police and that is how they enforce the law.

**Q59 Tim Loughton:** Do they do it as actively as they would where there is a known zone where sex workers will congregate? The buyers of their services are perhaps taking more of a risk because they are exposing themselves, whereas over the internet it can all be done very quietly and it is more of a job for the police to trawl through the internet to try to locate them. Perhaps to the other witnesses, is it now riskier for women because of online contacts being made rather than face-to-face contacts being made on the street where there maybe somebody else overseeing them, looking out for them, be it other sex workers or pimps or whatever?

**Laura Lee:** In many respects I believe that the move of the sex industry online has made our lives a lot easier and it is a lot safer.

**Tim Loughton:** Easier?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, in that we have safety apps now that keep us safe, on which we can look up the numbers and descriptions of problematic clients and also warn other sex workers of problematic clients. The difficulty that we have now, for example in Northern Ireland,

after the criminalisation went through on 1 June is that clients are refusing to use on the online screening process that we have and so it is putting us into greater danger. It is a very, very useful tool to have but in a further criminalised state it can be sadly abandoned I am afraid.

**Q60 Tim Loughton:** Can you explain how that works? So, the apps, how do you use them?

**Laura Lee:** There are a number of ways we can do it. There are several websites that are mainly advertising platforms and, if you will excuse my being crude for a minute, it is a bit like eBay but for adult services. Both parties leave each other one line of feedback, so that is good for us in terms of marketing but, crucially, we can go and look at the guy's feedback that he has had from other ladies and know that he is okay. Moving up from that we also have Ugly Mugs, which will flag up problematic clients as well, which will send us reports by text and by e-mail and there is also the Ugly Mugs Ireland app as well, which is part of your phone, so if a problematic number calls it will flash up straightaway and warn you, "This guy is known to be violent, do not answer".

**Q61 Tim Loughton:** This is a sort of TripAdvisor type virtual—

**Laura Lee:** It is pretty much but it is so important for our safety that we have that there as a database to access and keep ourselves safe.

**Q62 Tim Loughton:** That is used by sex workers but also by clients is it, or just by sex workers?

**Laura Lee:** The safety app is accessed purely by sex workers but the other platforms where we leave each other feedback are accessed by clients as well.

**Mia de Faoite:** We had a thing that was called the Amber Alert and if somebody had been violent we got a text on the phone, an amber alert to say, "Man in white van" and whatever like, but it was very hard because most of us had chaotic lives so phone numbers were changed, phones were lost. Half the time I would get one, "Don't be going with somebody" but it depends on how together they were to keep this information. I also wore a safety band that I was given, a personal alarm, and when it goes off it lets out a really high tone. There were 50 of them given out and, do you know, they get lost and it is very hard when you are trying to keep women together that have had very traumatic lives and so on, and the rapes continued. We still got pregnant. We still got beaten, do you know.

**Q63 Tim Loughton:** Okay. Can I come on to Ms Banyard? The conversation has been I think exclusively about males purchasing sex services from women. Well, of course, there are women who purchase sex services from women. There are men who purchase sex services from men, and other versions of this. Ms Banyard, you quite rightly described the CPS view of prostitution as violence against women. How do you then view male sex workers and the other scenarios that I have described?

**Kat Banyard:** As you say, the institution, the trade of prostitution is an overwhelmingly gendered phenomenon.

**Tim Loughton:** But not exclusively.

**Kat Banyard:** Not exclusively, but the reason why it is so gendered, which is why the CPS treats it in that way, why the Met Office for Policing and Crime does and why the Scottish Government does as well, is because it is overwhelmingly men who pay for sex. Even when they are paying other men it is men who are overwhelmingly the sex buyers. In fact there is an excellent project based in Scotland that provides support for the minority of men who were found to be involved in prostitution and, despite the fact that it was men who were the ones that were being paid for sex, this project still recognised it as a form of gender based violence because they recognise what underpins the motivations and attitudes of sex buyers, which is a sense of entitlement to pay to sexually access someone's body. Regardless of whether that person wants to have sex with them, they think that just by handing over money they are entitled to do what they want. It is that gendered aspect of prostitution that is so key to understanding why it happens and stopping it.

**Q64 Tim Loughton:** You would view a woman selling sex services to another woman, or a man selling sex services to a woman, is no less vulnerable and being no less abused than a woman selling sex services to a man?

**Kat Banyard:** Recognising prostitution as exploitation is not to say that every single incident is exactly the same, that every single person will have precisely the same experience. That is completely unrealistic. What we do know—

**Q65 Tim Loughton:** That is what you have claimed. You have claimed that for every single woman who is selling sex services to a man that is an act of violence and she is being abused, so surely the same definition should be applied to those other gender combinations that we have just heard.

**Kat Banyard:** Yes, of course. We recognise prostitution as a form of exploitation regardless of who is the one who is being paid for sex. The reality is that it is overwhelmingly men who pay for sex, and it is not a coincidence. It is underpinned by inequality between women and men. That is the reason it exists and it is a barrier to gender equality and, if we are serious as a society about gender equality, we have to tackle prostitution.

**Q66 Tim Loughton:** Okay. I understand. Before we get on to inequality too much, however, one could make a case that, because of your understandable complete focus on women's sex services being bought by men, there is a neglect for those who could be very vulnerable men or other very vulnerable women dealing with women, that their abuse and their need for support, whether it be down to addiction or anything else, is being neglected because you have entirely up to now focused on women selling sex services to men.

**Kat Banyard:** The sex buyer law, which criminalises paying for sex and decriminalises selling sex, is gender neutral. It is applied to whoever it is that is paying for sex and who is being paid and it is absolutely right that it is applied in that way. But it is also right that the CPS and the Scottish Government address prostitution in the context of their violence against women strategies because in order to understand why it is happening we have to understand that broader context of gender inequality, that is how we are going to stop it.



**Q67 Chair:** Thank you. We are going to hear very shortly from Nikki Holland, who is the Assistant Chief Constable who is the lead for the police on sex workers and she said this in her strategy, “The draft strategy makes clear that the majority of sex workers are not committing offences but they are a vulnerable group that we have a responsibility to protect.” That, presumably, is something you could agree with wholeheartedly, Laura Lee.

**Laura Lee:** Absolutely and I think the Merseyside model, as adopted by the Merseyside Police, is a valuable first step forward towards that in creating a safe zone for street sex workers to operate in. It saw the number of convictions against perpetrators of violence against sex workers increase by 80% and by anybody’s standards that has to be a good thing.

**Q68 Chair:** Yes. Have you looked at the Leeds example, the decision by the Leeds Police to have an area, a zone, that is managed where the scheme will allow prostitutes to work on the street at night without fear of arrest? I know Daria Pionko was killed in that zone but what do you think of the principle of a managed zone?

**Laura Lee:** It is not full decriminalisation but it is a valuable step forward and it brings back the police being there to look after us, rather than wasting precious police resources chasing our clients and arresting us for kerb crawling. Merseyside and Leeds indeed reached a very sensible decision in saying that, look, arresting these women and them going back out on the street the next night to earn the money to pay the fine is getting us absolutely nowhere. How about we protect them and allow them to work in safety, rather than persecute them? I am very much in favour of that.

**Q69 Chair:** Ms Banyard, of course there is decriminalisation in Holland and they have areas where people know they can go into houses and there are legalised brothels there. That seems to be working quite well. Does that deal with your issue of exploitation or are you still very worried that even if you have a managed area that is going to be a problem? Do you still see it as a women’s issue?

**Kat Banyard:** Absolutely. In countries that have legalised or so-called decriminalised prostitution, that means making brothels and pimping legal. There are very few people could look at what has happened there and say it has been a success. It has been an absolute disaster in terms of the welfare of women involved in prostitution and the threat of women becoming exploited through it. An evaluation that was conducted of prostitution in the Netherlands found that pimping was still a very common phenomenon, that the vast majority of women involved in so-called window prostitution, which Amsterdam is famed for, work with a so-called boyfriend or pimp, that the sex trafficking still goes on.

**Q70 Chair:** Your answer to that is no I think, you don’t think that is a solution to the problem. Ms de Faoite, of course, based on the evidence you have given us, you are against managed areas or managed streets where people know they can go in there. You are very much against that, are you not?

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, because the abuse and everything still happens. In Dublin we had a very good positive relationship with the police, they were very good to us. If there was a known sort of fight or whatever they would bar people from the streets for three or four months but they always come back, their hands are tied. They could pick us up or repair us

or be kind and compassionate to us but they could do nothing to stop what was coming in to get us. It is not a nice place I can imagine, as a police officer, that your hands are tied.

**Q71 Chair:** Sure. We are going to move on to the police now. We were slightly longer than we anticipated because obviously you gave us some very interesting evidence. But what you are telling this Committee is even though you have differences among yourselves, most notably Ms de Faoite and Laura Lee, you want the law changed, there has to be change.

**Laura Lee:** Yes, absolutely.

**Chair:** You would be very disappointed if the Committee came up with a recommendation at the end, even though we are just starting today, to say leave things as they are. You want change, is that right, Laura Lee?

**Laura Lee:** Yes, absolutely. All good law must be built on evidence and the evidence is apparent from around the world that decriminalisation is the best model and the best way forward to ensure our safety.

**Kat Banyard:** It would be very easy for MPs to put this on the too-difficult pile, too controversial. Look in front of you, you have dissenting opinions, let's just put it out for some more research. We have decades of research. We have a body count of women involved in prostitution in this country and around the world. We cannot afford to wait for more tragedies to happen before we act.

**Chair:** Of course. Ms De Faoite, very briefly because we are running out of time.

**Mia de Faoite:** Yes, very briefly, one's life has value so long as one attributes value to the lives of others and that is my wish for this Committee, that it attributes value to the lives of the addicted, the isolated, the trafficked, in essence, the haunted majority.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. Thank you for giving evidence and if there are other matters you want to raise with us, please drop us a note. Thank you.

### **Examination of Witnesses**

*Witnesses:* **Alan Caton OBE**, Independent Chair, Islington and Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, and **Nikki Holland**, Assistant Chief Constable, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Prostitution and Sex Work, gave evidence.

**Q72 Chair:** Assistant Chief Constable and Mr Caton, thank you very much for coming in to see us today. Nikki Holland, let me start with you, you had a bit of praise there from Laura Lee about what is happening in Merseyside and you have come out with this new strategy on behalf of the police chiefs, being very clear in your words that, "Prostitutes are victims and not offenders." Is that right?

**Nikki Holland:** The National Police Chiefs' Council's stance is that prostitutes don't necessarily commit crime per se and that we see this as a vulnerable group within society.

It is our job to protect those people. We have spoken about some of the statistics here, we have had 153 murders of prostitutes since 1990, which is probably the highest group of murders in any one category, so that gives the police cause for concern.

**Q73 Chair:** Mr Caton, you are unburdened by office, so you can be as open as you can with this Committee, based on your 30 years of experience in this field. Again, do you think that the law should be changed? Presumably, you would not like us to come out with a conclusion that things should remain the same.

**Alan Caton:** No, I think the law should change. Certainly, my experience is that the women involved in prostitution are incredibly vulnerable, very chaotic—I will probably go on to talk about the experiences in Ipswich a little bit later on—that drug addiction, that choice when they felt they had no choice, that left them vulnerable, open to exploitation, abuse, rape, assault, robbery. Of course, in Ipswich in 2006, sadly we saw five young women in a very short period of time murdered by what was a sex buyer, called Steve Wright.

**Q74 Chair:** Leeds suggested this managed zone, apart from—I say apart from, but obviously the murder was pretty horrific to the scheme—in general worked apparently quite well, Nikki Holland. Do you think that that is one of the things that we might look at, a managed area where consenting adults are able to do whatever they feel they need to do?

**Nikki Holland:** The views of that are very mixed across the whole of the UK in terms of police forces and police and crime commissioners. Leeds is yet to be evaluated. I have visited Leeds and certainly the partnership there are looking at what successes they have had in terms of harm reduction. We will all await the evaluation with interest.

**Alan Caton:** Now I can be unshackled, I am absolutely appalled that such a managed zone can be allowed to exist. I would question its legality. I certainly feel it plays right into the hands of pimps, traffickers and those who abuse and exploit women. Sadly, yet again, we have seen a young woman working on the street murdered, having worked in a so-called managed zone, where supposedly women are supposed to be kept safe. It is an absolute outrage that that should be allowed to go on. It is like not dealing with the problem here. These are vulnerable people that need some kind of support. There are men out there who will go abusing and exploiting those women, raping those women and murdering those women. Why authorities can turn around and say that is acceptable is beyond me.

**Q75 Chair:** Nikki Holland, I gave the example of the website that exists, which, to refresh your memory, is called SeekingArrangement, where 250,000 students have registered, described as “sugar babies” who are looking for rich older men to exchange sex for money in order to pay for their university studies. That is out there, it is on the internet, there are 250,000 students who have registered for this. What can we do about it? Is it something that we should allow to continue or should it be shut down?

**Nikki Holland:** I had never heard of that website either obviously when you spoke about it earlier. Again, advertising such services on the internet is not illegal. In terms of shutting it down, we would have to have a look at the vulnerability of those individuals involved on a case-by-case basis. I don't think we could assume all are consenting or assume all are being exploited either. You would have to deal with that in isolation.

**Chair:** Mr Caton, 250,000 sounds like an awful lot of young students, mostly women, who are doing this.

**Alan Caton:** It is a lot and I am sure some of them are going to be incredibly vulnerable and some of them are going to be victims of crime, abuse, assault. Should we allow it to happen? I don't know, probably we shouldn't because it is encouraging women to enter into sexual relationships for payment of money and, as we have already heard, if you accept that that is a form of violence against women, then, no, it shouldn't be allowed.

**Q76 Chair:** But you are both agreed, are you, that the law has to change, that it cannot remain as it is, that there needs to be a relook at this legislation, as the Committee is doing? Nikki Holland.

**Nikki Holland:** Any change in the law is clearly a matter for the politicians, not for the police. Our job is to enforce the law. There is a raft of laws around the whole sex-working industry but also some of the ancillary activities around antisocial behaviour, serious and organised crime. There is lots and lots of law around this, whether this particular aspect needs changing is a matter for politicians.

**Q77 Chair:** Mr Caton, is there a gap where we need to legislate, we need to change things?

**Alan Caton:** Yes, we do. The law is incoherent, it has had bits added to it over years. We don't, in this country, send a clear signal or have a principle towards what our view is around prostitution. I formed my view after the very tragic events in 2006 where all of the women who were murdered and all of the other women who were working on the streets at Ipswich at the time were drug addicted. When we spoke to those women they were using drugs before they went out on to the streets so that they could face what they were doing. None of the women I spoke to, certainly, would have said that that was their choice, they would want to get out. When you spoke to the men and asked why do they do it, it is because they can do things that they can't do at home. These are not disabled individuals, as the discussion went a bit earlier. These are predominantly married men, men with partners, men with children, who feel that they can go out and exploit women for payment and for me that was inherently wrong.

**Q78 Chair:** Yes. Since you are the only man who has given evidence so far to this inquiry, let me ask you this question, the focus is specifically on women and men who are, in effect what you are saying, predators, do you think that is the right focus?

**Alan Caton:** Absolutely, absolutely I do.

**Q79 Chair:** Tell me a country, Nikki Holland, that does this better than the United Kingdom?

**Nikki Holland:** I don't know, is the honest answer to that and I have listened with interest to some of the debates today around the different countries. I would be interested to speak to the likes of Sweden and Northern Ireland, these places, to ask, once introducing a sex buyer law, how do you enforce it? Because that would be something I would want to understand as the national lead.

**Alan Caton:** Going back to concentrating on the demand, if I can again give Ipswich as an example, when we redrafted our strategy after those murders part of the strategy was to tackle the demand. That, again, linked in with the then ACPO lead, Dr Tim Brain. It linked in with the Home Office strategy at the time. We visited various parts around the country. We wanted to ensure that the work we did to target those buyers of sex was a zero tolerance approach, so we were out in force. At the same time as targeting the buyers we provided support mechanisms for the women and we were providing prevent services to children and young people who were at risk of sexual exploitation, who, in effect, were going to be the next generation that were entering this harmful exploitative dangerous lifestyle. It was putting all those things together that made the difference in Ipswich. You can make a difference.

We wanted to look specifically, if we target the buyers, at whether it is going to drive things more underground and make things more dangerous for the women. Is it going to displace the issue? We spent a lot of money on employing and commissioning the University of East Anglia to independently review our strategy. We had a long-term view of the strategy because drug addiction is a very long-term thing to overcome. The overarching feedback—and we are nearly 10 years on now, sadly, and I find it difficult to believe where that time has gone—of the success in Ipswich is of changing male behaviour, of helping women transform their lives and lead more fulfilling lives, other than in prostitution, with the stories of the women who have now exited and say how talking to the team—the team who supported them are quite amazing—has saved their lives and how grateful they are. Men’s behaviour has changed and working with children and vulnerable people, preventing them entering this harmful lifestyle, has made a big difference in Ipswich. Now Ipswich is a place where there is no street prostitution.

**Q80 Chair:** Can you give us some figures, Nikki Holland, as to the number of foreign sex workers there are in the industry in the United Kingdom? We were given the figure of 50% coming from Eastern Europe. Do you have any better figures or more accurate figures for us?

**Nikki Holland:** I don’t have any more accurate figures and I had not heard the 50%. The last ACPO report that was done about migrant sex workers was in 2010, where they found that there were 30,000 and of those 2,600 had been exploited and trafficked. It was the last research that ACPO did.

**Chair:** So, 30,000, we did not have a percentage of foreign workers?

**Nikki Holland:** No, it was 30,000 foreign workers, not as a percentage of X amount in the UK.

**Chair:** Sorry, just to get it right, 30,000 foreign workers or 30,000 in the industry.

**Nikki Holland:** 30,000 migrant sex workers, yes.

**Chair:** Migrant, out of how many?

**Nikki Holland:** Don’t know.

**Chair:** Right, so we are very short of accurate data.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes. I have heard the figure 80,000 but I don't think we have accurate figures as to how many people are involved in the sex industry in the UK.

**Q81 Chair:** Right. How would we find out those figures, Mr Caton, so we know the extent that the problem is?

**Alan Caton:** Certainly, as far as I can recall, the Home Office data does suggest that there are about 80,000—I think it is Home Office data—women involved in prostitution in the UK.

**Chair:** On that figure about 40% would be foreign sex workers.

**Alan Caton:** There is certainly a significant number and I know from my experience when we did work with other agencies and go into off-street premises there were a lot of women from other countries who were engaged in the sex industry.

**Q82 Nusrat Ghani:** Mr Caton, you talked about changing behaviour and one of the concerns I have that if you are a sex worker and you might have a number of other issues—it might be abusing drugs or alcohol—how seriously are their testimonies taken, or how seriously do the police services take any calls that they make if they were attacked or abused by a client?

**Alan Caton:** Certainly in Suffolk and Ipswich, very, very seriously. I recall the morning the first woman was reported missing that we immediately put in a CID team to investigate that missing inquiry because it was very unusual, out of character, it was her pimp boyfriend who reported. I think the police were beginning to understand then that these women are incredibly vulnerable, that they are victims of rape, abuse, robbery, assault and they were victims who needed a police response like anybody else.

**Q83 Nusrat Ghani:** You mentioned a particular case when that young woman went missing but if we can just focus on maybe sex workers who try to make contact with the police because they have not been paid or they have been assaulted, every single query a sex worker makes, is it taken seriously by the police or are there or have there been incidents where possibly they have not been taken seriously because they are in the sex industry and they might have a number of other issues as well?

**Alan Caton:** It depends how far back you want me to go. Certainly, I have been retired from the police now for a couple of years and I am sure in the work that is done in Merseyside now with treating it as a hate crime—that is being, I think, shared across a lot of other forces—that the vulnerability is recognised. I am sure years ago that it was not taken as seriously as it should have been. But certainly in my time back in Ipswich those women were seen as victims when they reported crimes and were encouraged to do so. In fact, police officers were out on patrol to try to engage and have a relationship with those women.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I would agree with that. The culture has changed dramatically within the police and certainly that is what the operational guidance that the NPCC and I have been the author of is encouraging all police forces to do. Obviously, each Chief Constable is autonomous in terms of their operational delivery, however, that is very much the encouragement, treat it as a hate crime despite it not fitting the definition per se and treat



this as a vulnerable group within society who need to have risk managed and reduction of harm against them.

**Q84 Nusrat Ghani:** Ms Lee spoke about an online screening process where sex workers could put information in, especially if a potential client was abusive. Are you aware of this online screening process that she was talking about?

**Nikki Holland:** I wasn't, I was quite surprised when I heard that said and obviously that would be something we would be very interested in but I am not sure we would ever get access to as a police service. However, we do work quite closely with National Ugly Mugs, so we are aware of what they are doing in terms of reporting of crimes. They can obviously report on behalf of sex workers anonymously to the forces, so that at least we know if the offence has occurred.

**Nusrat Ghani:** You are aware of the Ugly Mugs.

**Nikki Holland:** I know about it nationally.

**Q85 Nusrat Ghani:** How much action do you take against men who are being reported as abusive on Ugly Mugs?

**Nikki Holland:** We take positive action, certainly that is what the operational guidance will say.

**Nusrat Ghani:** How many arrests have been made?

**Nikki Holland:** I have no idea.

**Nusrat Ghani:** How many men have been questioned?

**Nikki Holland:** I would have to get back to you with data like that.

**Alan Caton:** In my view, prostitution cannot be made safe. It is an inherently dangerous activity.

**Q86 Nusrat Ghani:** No, that is fine but if there is an Ugly Mugs app or website, how proactive are the police in finding these men and—

**Alan Caton:** Certainly, if I just give my experience in Ipswich, our whole attitude was to have a zero tolerance approach to men who abused and exploited women.

**Chair:** Then if the Assistant Chief Constable could write to us with that information that would be very helpful.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I can certainly get you statistics on that—

**Chair:** Thank you. Mr Caton, please.

**Alan Caton:** We were out every night of the week, covertly and overtly, prosecuting men who were kerb crawling. You also have to recognise the impact that this activity has on local communities. You would be having women walking home from work being accosted by men driving along asking if they wanted business. You were having women walking

out, trying to go about their lawful business and being accosted. You would men being accosted. It was very, very antisocial. There were certainly reports from residents about the abuse that was being shouted, the language, used condoms and needles being left around. You can't detract from the impact that prostitution has and the harm that it causes to all those involved in it. But going back to your point, we were out every night of the week. We would deal with men who were kerb crawling, they would all be arrested, they would be fingerprinted, they would be photographed, they would have their DNA taken. They would go to court if they did not admit their guilt. Most of them were quite happy to admit their guilt, as I said earlier, because most were married or in long-term relationships and had children and certainly did not want this to go out. We got all their details and it was all recorded on the PNC, so that we would know if they had been arrested or caught elsewhere and recidivism rates were very low.

**Q87 Nusrat Ghani:** On the issue about kerb crawling, if I can just ask a question to Ms Holland, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution found that, "Policing and enforcement was unevenly prioritised and resourced in different areas." Why is there no common policing strategy?

*Nikki Holland:* I would agree that that was true not so long ago but that is exactly what the operational guidance that I have produced with my team is trying to address. It is very different in terms of whether people enforce the law or are more supportive in terms of safeguarding. That is what we are encouraging through that guidance, is that we take a more strategic law-enforcement approach where we are working with partners and that if we are going to enforce the law we look at providing opportunities for outreach workers, and for health issues to be addressed—that is what we are promoting.

**Q88 Nusrat Ghani:** Is that because maybe sex workers are not seen as vulnerable women up and down the country, there is a lot of work to be done to change attitudes and behaviour?

*Nikki Holland:* I think that they are seen as vulnerable women but as to how they are dealt with around law enforcement is then a different issue. Some forces will enforce the law more rigidly than others.

**Q89 Nusrat Ghani:** You mentioned kerb crawling, Mr Caton, quite a bit but why are there more convictions for soliciting than there are for kerb crawling?

*Alan Caton:* Because police forces will concentrate on the easier option, which is to arrest the women who are involved and standing on the street. It is an easier option. I think it is the wrong option personally because we should be concentrating on the men who purchase the sex. That is why I think that there are more women who are arrested and that is why it bears out in those figures.

**Q90 Mr Burrowes:** When the Home Office last looked at this in any great depth there then followed bits and pieces of legislation and I would just like to get your view on how effective they have been. We had in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, "Paying for sexual services of a prostitute subject to force," how effective that has been? If we deal with that one first, first of all, has it been effective in any way?

**Alan Caton:** It has been challenging, from my time—the ACC will be more up to date because I have been out of the police now for just over two years. That came in at a time when I involved, I think Mr Coaker was doing some work on that, a few years ago. It is absolutely right that it is an offence for a man to have sex with a woman who was forced or coerced to do so but it is very difficult to prove. I am not sure there have been many convictions. We have, certainly in Suffolk, arrested men on suspicion of that and some men who have admitted that the women may have been forced or coerced have been cautioned as a result. Across the country I don't think it is a piece of legislation that is used widely and it is challenging to enforce.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I would agree with that. Again, I would have to get detail and write to the Committee about the exact data.

**Mr Burrowes:** Yes, please.

**Nikki Holland:** However, my understanding is it is rarely used and one of the problems is—from the earlier discussion that the panel had—around getting the evidence from these vulnerable people to tell us that that exchange has taken place. It is very difficult to get evidence in any other way than getting testament from a victim.

**Q91 Mr Burrowes:** In terms of a sex buyer law, how would that impact particularly among vulnerable coerced trafficked women? How would that have an impact on them?

**Nikki Holland:** Certainly the working group that I work with around this issue would argue that that is more likely to push it underground and then make those women more vulnerable because they will go to more remote locations to get clients and perhaps take clients that they don't know and they don't know anything about. But I accept there are reverse views around that as well from other stakeholders.

**Q92 Mr Burrowes:** There is one probably not so far away from you. We have heard evidence that you take particular focus that the sex buyers' enforcement was jacked up. How did that impact? We heard earlier from Ms Lee that that kind of enforcement activity would put prostitutes and sex workers at risk. What is your view in principle?

**Alan Caton:** I get incredibly frustrated with this phrase, "You are just driving it underground". There is nothing more dangerous than a woman working on any street who is addicted to drugs, getting into the car of a man she does not know. I don't know how much more dangerous it can get and we are going to sit here and continue to allow that to happen. This is a fundamentally dangerous activity that cannot be made safe.

**Q93 Mr Burrowes:** In relation to under 18s, first, both of you, have either of you seen evidence of under 18s working on the streets?

**Alan Caton:** With the murder investigation in 2006 we had a wealth of information around the whole issue of prostitution. Part of our strategy was to understand the problem before we could target what we were going to do about it. We found there were 107 women—which was far more than most people thought—who were working on the streets of Ipswich over a period of time. There were a number of those women who started prostitution as children, under the age of 18, some as young as 14 or 15. Yes, I can provide evidence or have seen the fact that these women entered then and nationally that is

recognised too. In fact when I started to look at national statistics certainly 90% to 95% of women in street prostitution are addicted to heroin, cocaine, class-A drugs, 50% entered as children. That tied up with the information we were getting as a result of the information from the murder investigation.

**Q94 Mr Burrowes:** Do you have any evidence to bring in relation to dealing with both enforcement of those buying sex from under 18s or indeed what is now under the Serious Crime Act 2015, the decriminalisation of under 18s selling sex? Effectively, we have a sex buyer law for under 18s in force at the moment and I wonder whether you have any evidence of both the enforcement side and indeed dealing with and supporting the victims?

**Nikki Holland:** With under 18s, obviously the law is very clear for us, it is abuse and we would deal with that in terms of child sexual exploitation and rape, as opposed to dealing with it as sex working. I don't have any statistics but, again, that is something I could research around statistics of people who are victims, who are sex workers, but that is assuming they have told us that they are sex workers.

**Mr Burrowes:** Anything to add to that? Do you have any evidence? I suppose, no, you have not been involved in this particular piece of legislation at enforcement level.

**Alan Caton:** Certainly, we have had evidence in Suffolk of children as young as 15 being trafficked into Ipswich for the purpose of sexual exploitation and, as a result, we have taken people to court. We have taken people to court for running brothels where under age people have been involved. We have had some success in identifying under age people and, hopefully, helping them exit.

**Q95 Mr Burrowes:** I hear your reservations in relation to the sex buyer law, and your concerns about the negative impacts, but you are supportive of the principle of a sex buyer law, effectively, in relation to under 18s and you recognise the principle of exploitation of a 17-year-old. Why do you suddenly shift in your concerns about the vulnerability and the impact on them when they turn 18?

**Nikki Holland:** It is obviously the police's job to enforce the law and the legislation that exists. That legislation is in place for under 18s and as and when legislation comes in—if it does indeed around the sex buyer law—we would look to adapt our operational guidance accordingly but at this moment in time that is not an offence.

**Q96 Mr Burrowes:** Just finally, on your own question regarding it, there is obviously the focus on the victim. How would it change in relation to the decriminalisation side to sex buyer law?

**Nikki Holland:** In terms of the sex buyers themselves, do you mean?

**Mr Burrowes:** Yes.

**Nikki Holland:** We would obviously have to adapt the guidance in terms of how we are going to enforce the law, because we balance our resources at the moment around threat, risk and harm. We would have to balance it in terms of the threat, risk and harm posed to the community and the sex workers by those people buying the sex.

**Q97 Mr Burrowes:** In terms of the victim focus of the prostitutes following implementation of the sex buyer law, how would your guidance change?

**Nikki Holland:** I do not think it would change a great deal because the operational guidance already encourages police forces to treat those people as vulnerable, not to necessarily enforce the law around them.

**Q98 Mr Burrowes:** From your look at the guidance, how would you see it impact the effectiveness of the guidance in relation to the victims?

**Alan Caton:** Absolutely we need to support the victims and we need to be proactive in helping them exit this violating, harmful, exploitative business. But for me, there is something around—one of the things that is often said to me, after the success of Ipswich is, “Why did you wait for five murders to actually do this?” It is a difficult one to answer, but we did. We grasped it. It was unprecedented, it was probably the biggest murder investigation that the country had seen and we grasped that and we did something about it. We really have an opportunity to do something now and not wait for more murders to happen before we act upon it.

**Q99 James Berry:** I should say that I have worked as a barrister for Merseyside Police, for the record. I am quite sure you are right, Mr Caton, that the vast majority of women who work as prostitutes find themselves in terrible situations and those situations are being exploited by the men who pay for sex, but we have heard and will hear evidence from some women who sell sex who do not consider themselves to be exploited, who want to continue in their trade and do not want it inhibited in any way, and in fact think prostitution should be entirely decriminalised. Of course, we have to take all the different arguments before reaching our conclusions. Just taking that view for a moment, do you think that decriminalisation of prostitution entirely would increase or decrease the number of people using prostitutes?

**Alan Caton:** To decriminalise prostitution per se would, in my view, just play into the hands of traffickers and pimps and organised crime gangs who exploit these women and earn vast sums of money. There are huge sums of money to be earned out of this and there are very few people in this country that do earn huge sums of money. Kat Banyard was talking earlier about that demand and we need to change that demand because it fuels the trade. Women are being trafficked into this country because there is a demand for it; there are men willing to pay for that.

**Q100 James Berry:** Does it follow, then, that you think that decriminalisation, because it would increase demand, would increase instances of violence?

**Alan Caton:** I do believe so, and I am sure you will get people here who will say that it is absolutely their choice, and I am sure they genuinely believe that, but we cannot form policy on such a minority of people who will say that.

**Q101 James Berry:** You say it is so harmful to such a large proportion that the small proportion—

**Alan Caton:** Yes. It is tiny. In my experience, there was not one in Ipswich who said, “Actually, it is my choice; I want to be there”. Some felt they had no other choice but there was nobody saying, “I love my job, I want to be there”.

**Q102 James Berry:** Absolutely. Assistant Chief Constable?

**Nikki Holland:** I would agree with Alan’s latter point there. Even though there are sex workers who have chosen to go into that occupation, it was a career choice and it has not come out of some extremely negative life experiences, we would still treat them as a vulnerable group. In terms of any evidence base, I have not seen an evidence base that suggests it would suddenly grow if we decriminalised, but again, I would wait to get the information on that.

**Q103 James Berry:** Just one more question, if I may, dealing with the law as it is. Merseyside, under the current Metropolitan Police Commissioner, I believe, adopted a very supportive model to the sex worker community, which included an independent sexual violence adviser, and that approach led to an 83% conviction rate in all cases going to court, and 95% of women involved in these cases exiting prostitution and street work. Do you think that that Merseyside model, just dealing with the law as it is, is a successful one and that it should be rolled out to other forces?

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I do, and again, obviously, we have promoted that within the operational guidance. Working closely with National Ugly Mugs, with Armistead, we have 46% of reports that come through from sex workers who are willing to come and speak to the police. We have high levels of intelligence coming from sex workers in relation to dangerous offenders, and we believe that is because we work with the sex offenders, with the partners, to get to the nub of the problem and not just enforce the law around it.

**Q104 Mr Umunna:** Can I just ask, Ms Holland, for a clarification of the figure that you gave at the outset? Was that 153 prostitutes have been murdered since 1990?

**Nikki Holland:** That is correct, yes.

**Q105 Mr Umunna:** Of course, that is an appalling figure and we have just heard some very powerful evidence from Mia de Faoite and others. Do you not think it is a damning indictment of our society that this issue is not higher up the national agenda?

**Nikki Holland:** I think certainly from a policing perspective, it is high on the national agenda. My working group reports in to the violence against public protection group and that group has CSE, human trafficking, and all of the key things that I think are the highest risk for forces in the UK on that agenda.

**Q106 Mr Umunna:** But do you think there is an attitude that these are prostitutes, so people just do not talk about this; it is not reported in the way that it would otherwise be?

**Nikki Holland:** I think that it polarises views dramatically across society, and policing, and all other aspects of the public sector. However, the operational guidance that we have produced is encouraging forces to go in the direction of recognising that vulnerability and the fact that we need to safeguard this vulnerable group of people.



**Q107 Mr Umunna:** Just on that, I know you have to be careful about the terms you use because of what you encompass, but say, of prostitution, what percentage of prostitutes who are working are those who have been trafficked and brought here from abroad?

**Nikki Holland:** The last study we have is the ACPO one, which would say 10%.

**Q108 Mr Umunna:** What are the main countries of origin in respect of where they are coming from?

**Nikki Holland:** Mixed, but more towards Eastern European.

**Q109 Mr Umunna:** Just more generally, and I am not sure anyone has reached the nub of this issue with you, do you believe that a sex buyer law ultimately will reduce demand? The Swedish model is primarily the argument that has been made to us by the previous set of witnesses, and in terms of the effectiveness of it, or not, there are different views as to how effective it has been in Sweden. Do you believe that if we adopted a British model of the same that it would materially reduce the demand, would materially reduce the numbers primarily of men seeking these—I do not like to call it a service, because it is not that; that is not the way I see it, anyway—but men engaged in this?

**Nikki Holland:** I would need to see some more evidence to convince me of that. I know that discussions that I have had with—

**Q110 Mr Umunna:** To convince you that it would reduce demand?

**Nikki Holland:** That it would reduce demand. Certainly, I know that End Demand will say that that is the case and that they have evidence from Sweden to support that. Certainly, the academic research on my national group is quite the reverse and they would say that it would make no difference whatsoever; it would just drive it underground. But I am aware there are alternative views to that, and I think it is important that we listen to all of them.

**Q111 Mr Umunna:** You sound rather sceptical about whether it would reduce demand. If you are not to have a sex buyer law, what would be the alternative in reducing demand that you would advance?

**Nikki Holland:** I think that the law that we have addresses the problem in terms of what the police focus will be, which is the serious and organised crime criminality, above and behind the sex working, and obviously, from a community perspective, the associated nuisance and crime that sometimes occurs from the work of sex work would be a priority for us—

**Q112 Mr Umunna:** Sorry to cut you off, going to Mr Caton's description of the men who are involved in this, often everyday guys who just do this because they think they can get away with it and can exploit women. You are talking about the organised criminals who do this, but what about that guy who is in a stable, happy situation, has children, as Mr Caton outlined. I do not want to put words in his mouth or misinterpret what he said. That person, really, often gets away scot-free.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, the honest answer is, I have no idea how you would stop that particular demand, because the evidence that I have heard so far is about helping, often

women, to get out of the sex industry and to stop supplying that demand. What I have not heard as yet is what is the alternative for the men, that does not then get them to seek it somewhere else.

**Q113 Mr Umunna:** Hang on just a minute, though. You are the police lead on this. You are an expert. You must have an idea about what we do about that kind of guy and how we reduce demand in that situation. Because, dare I say it, if you cannot think of any solution, how on earth is anyone else going to?

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I do not see how you can end that demand.

**Q114 Mr Umunna:** On the supply side, going to Mr Caton, I said earlier, and I think you both were here during the exchanges, that the big elephant in the room for me is definitely this issue of substance misuse and particularly drug abuse. How and what was most effective in Ipswich in dealing with the context and the environment, and it is not cause and effect, as one of the previous witnesses we heard was making very clear to us. But how did you tackle the kind of things that make up the environment, within which women go into prostitution?

**Alan Caton:** Can I just offer, ACC, the evaluation from Ipswich, particularly around tackling the demand and how it worked and how it helped to reduce that demand? I would like to share that.

**Mr Umunna:** Please.

**Alan Caton:** Certainly around drugs, it was certainly acknowledged that all of the women who were involved in street prostitution in Ipswich were addicted to drugs, but what we did was set up a multi-agency make a change team. That team consisted of police officers, social workers, family support workers, probation officers. A lot of criticism came in to us because they felt it should only be voluntary sector to do that work because the women would not actually engage with statutory services. That was not the case at all; women were pleased to work with that statutory body of women, predominantly, on that team. What we did, we had a bespoke case conference for each individual woman to look at their needs. This was not a case of, “You are signposted to that treatment”. These were incredibly vulnerable, chaotic women living chaotic lifestyles. They had problems with housing, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, access to health services, access to children, access to benefits, in and out of prison. So, each woman had a very different story to tell, and it was about providing the services that each individual woman needed. We laid on dental services, for example, on a Tuesday evening, because a lot of these women, addicted to crack cocaine, did not have any teeth. So, we were able to show them that we were serious about this and provide them the support they wanted. There were drug treatment agencies that women went away on—

**Q115 Mr Umunna:** But the non-statutory, voluntary side of this was very important?

**Alan Caton:** Yes, it was; yes, it was.

**Q116 Mr Umunna:** Do you think that the funding constraints, in particular that the voluntary sector is facing—I have to disclose an interest, I think it has already been

mentioned by the Chair: I have a connection to St Mungo's, for example—has impacted on the services that you are talking about?

*Alan Caton:* Yes, I do.

**Q117 Mr Umunna:** You wanted to say something about the demand issue?

*Alan Caton:* I just feel it does have an impact. Ipswich, if you take it as a microcosm, it was a big town; it had a prostitution problem on the street, it had over 100 women that were engaged in that trade. Understand the issue. Our strategy was co-ordinated to tackle the demand, to provide support, to provide preventative services—

**Q118 Mr Umunna:** How did you tackle the demand?

*Alan Caton:* Because we were out every night of the week, covertly and overtly identifying kerb crawlers and arresting them.

**Q119 Mr Umunna:** Your solution is that you have to put major policing resource into this?

*Alan Caton:* It is not major. We used special constables who were trained to do that work, so they were not impacting on the normal force. More specials got involved, were interested in this work. There are ways in which you can do this, and I really do firmly believe that.

**Q120 Chair:** It was suggested—in fact it is being used at the moment—that the Metropolitan Police are taking nuns out with them when they go on patrols in those areas where there are a number of prostitutes, and Cardinal Nichols said that he backed the scheme, describing the presence of these women as having a helpful effect for these vulnerable women. Have you heard of what the Met are doing, and do you think this is a good idea?

*Nikki Holland:* I have not heard about nuns specifically, but certainly street pastors and outreach workers going out with the police is normal practice, certainly in Merseyside, and I think yes, it is a very good idea. Any support that can be given to the people on the streets is good.

**Q121 Chair:** I presume you were not accompanied by nuns in Ipswich?

*Alan Caton:* No, but we were accompanied by street pastors. The street pastors in Ipswich had just been set up. I think we set them up in 2005, 2006. Their first big deployment was providing reassurance on the streets of Ipswich, and they were a huge support to us. As Mr Umunna said, the third sector, the voluntary sector, provided fantastic services. No one agency can deal with this as a problem; this is a huge problem that needs lots of agencies to work together in a co-ordinated way with one strategic aim. What I will say is that the strategic aim in Ipswich was to remove street prostitution. It was not talking about harm reduction or reduction here and there; it was very clear. We needed to remove street prostitution to make women safe.

**Q122 Chair:** After the next question I am going to have to leave the chair because we have a debate on police funding, which has been asked for by the Committee, so I have to go and prepare for that; Mr Loughton will take the chair. But first, Nusrat Ghani?

**In the absence of the Chair, Tim Loughton was called to the Chair.**

**Q123 Nusrat Ghani:** I think Ms Holland possibly answered my question. I have some evidence here from Professor Philip Hubbard, University of Kent, who said that, “Criminalisation of purchase has not ended the sale of sex, simply changed the way it is sold. The sex work research hub states, ‘Attempts to criminalise purchase tend to change how sex is bought and sold, not the overall supply and demand.’” I was interested to hear Mr Caton say that demand could be manipulated or changed. I struggle to see how demand can be changed if there are always going to be men trying—you might be arresting some but there might be more coming forward and those men might continue to engage in buying sex. Then, going back to this piece of research, that if it is pushed further underground—and I know you are saying it is already an incredibly dangerous activity to be involved in—are the women not made even—

**Alan Caton:** Can I ask how? What you mean by that, then? How does it get further?

**Q124 Nusrat Ghani:** If they are working on a street, then you might be aware of who they are. They might be communicating with other sex workers on the street. But if they are being then forced to work where they never meet any other sex worker or their pimp puts them in even worse, horrific circumstances, they feel even more threatened because of the situation that they are in or even more threatened not to go to the police because they are so far removed from society, and marginalised even further. What I do not want to do is have a conversation where we talk about supporting some sex workers and ignore the ones that we leave behind, and how do we then try to make sure that we do not do that, that no one is left behind?

**Alan Caton:** Absolutely. It is about understanding the problem. It goes back to the very first point that we wanted to do in Ipswich, which was to understand the problem. We need to understand how many people are involved, how they are affected, the inherent harm that is undertaken by these women engaged in this activity and what drives it? What drives the men who use prostitution? Where do they go? So, it is about understanding it. You are absolutely right; no woman should be left out in the cold in any of this. They should all be given the appropriate service to help them exit.

**Q125 Nusrat Ghani:** We have talked about organised criminal gangs and them trafficking women over here. What do we need to do to make sure that we improve in capturing these organised criminals and removing them and supporting and rescuing these women? I cannot believe we have got to a situation where we have so many being trafficked into this country.

**Alan Caton:** It is because there are huge organised criminal gangs that want to make huge money out of this, and there is a demand chain, a supply chain, if you like, that continually is putting money into this as a service, where women are being abused and exploited and harmed on a daily basis. If we take away that demand, which is what we are talking about

here, and this is all about that, you will reduce that. We want to make the UK a hostile place for pimps and traffickers and those who abuse and exploit women.

**Q126 Nusrat Ghani:** In your experience, how many traffickers have been arrested?  
**Alan Caton:** Traffickers?

**Q127 Nusrat Ghani:** Traffickers; people traffickers or criminal gangs involved in prostitution?

**Alan Caton:** Certainly, the last year of my service, we had about four or five court cases.

**Q128 Nusrat Ghani:** Four or five? That is four or five individuals?  
**Alan Caton:** These individuals, they were a gang. They were three or four people together.

**Q129 Nusrat Ghani:** What were their convictions?  
**Alan Caton:** Trafficking.

**Q130 Nusrat Ghani:** Were they sent to prison for a long period of time? How much were they fined?

**Alan Caton:** Four or five years.

**Q131 Nusrat Ghani:** Four or five years? For trafficking how many women?  
**Alan Caton:** Yes, absolutely. Well, I think it was two, the last one I can recall. It was at Ipswich Crown Court. I cannot recall the total detail but there was a trafficking case just before I finished at Ipswich Crown Court. They were found guilty and sent to prison. Not that it was long enough at all.

**Q132 Nusrat Ghani:** That is not a real deterrent, is it?  
**Alan Caton:** No.

**Q133 Nusrat Ghani:** That is not going to give the women confidence to come forward either?

**Alan Caton:** Well, the women should feel confident to come forward. The police can only deal with what is given to them and they can present the evidence. What goes on in the court is a matter for the court.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I will certainly research that and come back to the Committee with some statistics for you, but in my experience, there are very few because it is very, very difficult to prove. As you have rightly identified, the women are very vulnerable. In most of the cases where we try and we execute search warrants, the people who are victims will say that they are not victims, and it is very, very difficult to get that evidence. I know that there are other suggestions around observations and covert methods, but ultimately you need that victim's statement of complaint and that is what is very difficult for the police. That is why we want to work more with the sex workers themselves, to give them

confidence to report to the police, to give us intelligence and give us those opportunities to be more proactive and not reliant on their evidence.

**Q134 James Berry:** Yes, Mr Caton, you have spoken repeatedly and have used the phrase “street prostitution” and from some of the evidence we have heard before, there is perhaps a difference, in the market at least, for street prostitution and for online-based services and escorting and so on. In terms of reducing demand, it may not be possible to reduce the desire of men to use prostitutes, but it is certainly possible to reduce the availability of prostitution in terms of street level prostitution by making somewhere like Ipswich a very hostile place for users of sex services. It is more difficult to do that online and we have seen with things like psychoactive substances, people purchase them online because it is just easier to do it confidentially. People are not seeing you trying to buy sex services on the side of the road; they can just do it in their bedroom at home. Do you think we need to look at that and how we can reduce the availability of sex to purchase online?

**Alan Caton:** Absolutely, because it is not a crime. This is the fundamental flaw here, that I can go out and my officers can go out on the street, they can arrest kerb crawlers, but it is quite legitimate in this country for a woman to work in a flat, sell her services on the internet. Men can go and purchase sex, and that is a legitimate activity in this country, that is not against the law.

**Q135 James Berry:** Something that you think should be a crime?

**Alan Caton:** Yes, I do, because I do not think prostitution is safe on the street or off it, and we have examples of women being murdered in off-street premises.

**Q136 James Berry:** You could flood the street with police officers, but the whole business could effectively go on—

**Alan Caton:** Again, you can understand the problem. Yesterday I spoke to one of the police officers that used to be on my team. There are certain sites you can look at, and there are still over 300 people—women mainly, but some men—selling sex in Suffolk.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, as Mr Caton said, it is not a criminal offence and therefore it is not something that we look at, and if we were told to look at it, it is really, really difficult to police the internet. I think it was in the earlier panel that you spoke about how the police can go on and see where sex is being sold and certainly that would give us an intelligence profile about where the sex was being sold, but what that wouldn’t give us was who was buying it, and we would have to use far more intrusive techniques to get that, which in itself is then resource-intensive and would go with competing other demands such as CSE online. That is the difficulty that we have if that law were to come in, in terms of the internet.

**Q137 James Berry:** If we wanted to reduce the availability of sex to buy overall, it would be a case of prohibiting something that is currently allowed, which is the sale of sex by an individual in a flat?

**Alan Caton:** Yes. As our colleagues in Sweden were telling us, a law can send a very powerful message. He gave the example of why people stop at a red traffic light at 4.00 in the morning when the roads are totally clear; because it is the law and people do tend to



generally comply with the legislation. We need to send a powerful message out that it is unacceptable for men to abuse and exploit women, because, in my experience and certainly in Ipswich, that was what they were doing.

**Q138 Chair:** Can I just ask some contextual questions? Assistant Chief Constable, you have been involved in policing for about 28 years, and, Mr Caton, you were policing for 30 or so years. How do you think the prevalence of prostitution and the nature of prostitution has changed over that time?

**Alan Caton:** Again, we did some work on that, and it has changed quite a lot. We certainly went back and spoke to people who were involved in dealing with it. This is just about Ipswich, so I cannot talk about it nationally. Probably it had been there a long time but the first records we have with people who were engaged in it were in the 1960s and predominantly it was for social and economic reasons. Women were on the streets in Ipswich around the port area, ensuring that they had money to feed and clothe their children. I joined the police in the early 1980s and was involved in what was then called a vice squad, which we obviously do not call them anymore. It was very much concentrated on targeting the women; that was what we knew what to do. Women in Ipswich were then being pimped more regularly, so they were being brought into Ipswich from places like Nottingham with pimps, and they were used to sell on the streets of Ipswich. More latterly, and certainly in the mid to late 2000s, it was very much local women with drug addiction that fuelled the trade, so it has changed over time. Certainly, all the women in Ipswich—certainly those who were murdered—were all there fuelling a drug habit.

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I would agree with what Alan said, but what I would add to that is that certainly street sex working was far more prominent when I joined the police 28 years ago, and it is now far more online than it is in the streets. But I think our attitude towards it in terms of going from an enforcement base to a recognition around vulnerability, links to mental health, links to drug abuse, is probably the most significant change in how we view it as a police service.

**Q139 Chair:** Do you think, over that period, that demand has increased or lessened, and do you think the dangers to the women sex workers have heightened or lessened?

**Nikki Holland:** For me, demand has stayed the same, but I do not have any statistical figures to back that up. I have not really seen any change in demand, other than the change towards the internet. In terms of the women themselves, the more vulnerable the location they are in, the more likely they are going to be subject to high levels of abuse because although we have spoken about 153 murders, that does not begin to describe the near death experiences of many, many more, and assaults every day. Whether it is because trust has increased and therefore the police now find out about it more than they used to, I do not know, but certainly we are seeing a far higher level of reporting of crimes against sex workers than we ever have done.

**Q140 Chair:** On balance, you think that women are more vulnerable now?

**Nikki Holland:** I am not too sure about more vulnerable or more willing to tell us, but certainly we recognise it as a vulnerability and a high threat group in terms of violence.

**Alan Caton:** There are some fantastic services in this country that support vulnerable women out on the streets, and there are some really good stories around the support networks that are available to help women exit prostitution. Certainly the Ipswich example, the work we did in supporting the women and at the same time, simultaneously, tackling the demand, has made a huge impact. That just does not need me to say that; the residents who lived in that area that was blighted by prostitution now live in a quiet, peaceful, tranquil, lovely residential area that is not blighted by the antisocial behaviour of prostitution and cars running round and round in a circuit. We can make a difference and I think some of those support networks have helped women exit, and some police activity across the country—although as we mentioned right at the beginning it is very patchy—Nottingham is a good example. They can talk about it—a few years ago, they were working with 300 or so women and it is now down to 100 or so. It is coming down in some areas, but others, I am sure, it will have increased.

**Q141 Chair:** It is quite interesting. You think that the demand has changed, or has remained the same, more or less, very roughly, and yet attitudes to sex, availability of sex at a lower age, perhaps, has changed drastically over those 30 years. Yet you think that demand for paid for sex services has not changed. The two things you did not mention, which I would have conjectured have changed very much over those last 30 years are, first, the involvement of organised crime and gangs and, secondly, the greater instance of women from overseas. Those are big differences in the last 30 years, are they not?

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, in terms of organised criminality, we are seeing more from overseas, and it is becoming more of a global trade; I think that has changed. But I still think that the intelligence that we have around this is quite sparse and we need a lot more information to fully understand the nature and the scale of the problem and its links to serious and organised crime.

**Q142 Chair:** How do you take the gangs out of the equation? Young women who are trafficked into this country from a completely different country and background by traffickers, whose intentions are entirely malign towards them, where they come to this country knowing nobody, having no support networks or family to be able to rescue them from their circumstances, surely those women are far more vulnerable to harm than women 30 years ago who were local, or might well have been? Would that not be a fair assessment?

**Nikki Holland:** Yes, I would agree with that and certainly out of the last 11 murders of sex workers nine of those have been migrants, so that would support what you are saying, but again, that goes back to that trust element. We need the third sector organisations to work with those women to get them to trust the police and to have the confidence to report to us, or at least report to other people, so that we can get the intelligence and we can tackle the individuals that are behind it and responsible for the crimes.

**Q143 Chair:** In terms of taking the gangs out of the equation, legislation around trafficking of persons, has that made it easier or are we nowhere near it?

**Nikki Holland:** We have the legislation certainly around modern day slavery and the trafficking; the legislation is there. It is difficult to find the evidence in the intelligence case to prosecute it.

**Alan Caton:** It is a challenge, certainly, for prosecution authorities to take those cases to court. Certainly we have examples in Ipswich where we had Chinese women who were trafficked into the UK thinking they were going into domestic service but actually found themselves in a prostitute ring in a house, being moved around, not only in Ipswich. There are now Romanian women coming in and there is a hotel issue with women being moved around from hotel to hotel. It is a very real problem and you are right, the organised crime gangs behind this are making a huge sum of money. Going back to my original point, let us tackle the demand and make it a hostile place for those people to bring women to.

**Chair:** Anybody else? Thank you very much for that evidence. If there are other issues that you have not mentioned today arising from the inquiry—obviously, this is the first of the sessions that we have had—please feel free to write to the Committee. We have quite a lot of ground still to cover, but we have also had a very interesting session today. Thank you very much for your submissions.