

Redbridge Prostitution Strategy 2017- 2023
A strategy for prevention, exit and enforcement



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Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Aims and Objectives	Page 4
Enforcement	Page 5
Environment	Page 6
Engagement	Page 7
Exit	Page 7
Appendix	Page 10

Introduction

This strategy covers the period April 2017 to March 2023. It is the second prostitution strategy for Redbridge, carrying on from the 'Reducing on-Street Prostitution in Redbridge Strategy 2012 – 16' and its subsequent one year refresh to cover 2016-17.

This strategy continues to address the issue of on-street prostitution in the Borough's hotspot location but widens the focus of the work to include off street prostitution related activity. It also provides information in relation to the expected response to victims of human trafficking where they are encountered as part of the work undertaken to reduce prostitution.

The Redbridge Community Safety Partnership recognises that responding to prostitution requires the involvement of a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. The agencies will work together to respond to both the needs of those involved in prostitution as well as the needs of those members of the community affected by prostitution related activity.

The aim of this strategy is therefore to provide a coordinated multi-agency approach to responding to and reducing prostitution in Redbridge, while providing help and support to those involved in it.

In 2016 a Scrutiny Working Group was convened to focus on the "routes out of prostitution". In particular, the Working Group considered opportunities for a holistic exit response which could assist and support those involved in both on and off street prostitution.

There were a number of policy options open to the Council as a basis for the local prostitution strategy over the next four years, all of which were considered as part of the Scrutiny Working Group.

It was widely accepted that a version of the "Nordic" model first implemented by Sweden would be the most favourable option for the Council to pursue by encouraging the flexible use of existing laws. This approach represents a growing international trend. France, Northern Ireland and Norway have passed legislation making the purchase of sex illegal, while decriminalising the sale of sexual services.

Following the presentation of the final Scrutiny report to Cabinet for discussion, the Cabinet made the following statement of policy, which is the foundation that the Redbridge Prostitution Strategy 2017- 2023 - A strategy for prevention, exit and enforcement is based:

The Council believe that no one should be able to buy the body of another person for sex, where management, control or coercion is involved.

The Council believes that the majority of women involved in prostitution are vulnerable whether that might be as a result of substance misuse or the wider prevalence of poverty, management, control and coercion. As such women involved

in prostitution need to be supported rather than punished, putting their safety and wellbeing first.

The Council believes that the focus of policy should be on a combination of enforcement activity to reduce demand including taking a more focused approach to kerb crawling, control and coercion, coupled with taking a supportive approach to women, seeking to increase engagement with services that provide exit opportunities.

The full Routes Out of Prostitution Scrutiny report can be viewed through the Redbridge Council website or using the following link:

<http://moderngov.redbridge.gov.uk/documents/g7220/Public%20reports%20pack%2022nd-Nov-2016%2019.15%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Although the policy statement and strategy refers only to women as they are disproportionately represented, the wider aims do include any men or boys who may be involved in prostitution.

Aims and Objectives:

This strategy aims to:

- reduce on-street prostitution in Redbridge with particular reference to the Borough's hot-spot location and to address the impact that this activity has on the lives of local residents;
- reduce off street prostitution through enforcement activity together with exit and safeguarding support for the women involved;
- deliver a year on year reduction in antisocial behaviour and crime associated with prostitution related activity;
- improve cross borough working and the exchange of information with neighbouring boroughs in London and Essex around prostitution.

To achieve the above aims the Community Safety Partnership and other agencies involved in this work will focus on the following objectives:

- **Enforcement:** To disrupt markets and tackle demand, activity will be focused on those who purchase sex, aiming to reduce demand through targeted enforcement and communications activity.
- **Environment:** Carrying out environmental improvements to reduce the opportunity for on-street prostitution to take place and dealing with anti-social behaviour generated by the activity.
- **Engagement:** Responding to local residents concerns around prostitution by:
 - a) carrying out engagement with local communities to keep them informed, increasing local community intelligence and where possible including them in some of the work carried out to reduce

prostitution in the borough

- b) implementing agreed processes to close brothels and disrupting the marketing around them.
- **Exit:** Providing outreach, advocacy and support through specialist service provision working with those involved in prostitution.
- **Improving coordination with neighbouring Authorities:** Increase cross borough working and information exchange around prostitution. Reducing displacement as a result of operations between East London boroughs and improving the support for those involved in prostitution through the exchange of information and potential cross borough commissioning of services.

Enforcement

In England, the exchange of sexual services for money is technically legal, but there are a number of related crimes and forms of anti-social behaviour. These include:

- soliciting in a public place;
- 'Kerb crawling';
- living off immoral earnings and keeping a brothel used for prostitution;
- related anti-social behaviour;
- noise nuisance;
- littering and flyposting.

Enforcement activity to reduce street prostitution is the most visible and resource intensive aspect of tackling prostitution. It can have an immediate impact upon the situation yet also needs to be carried out in a sustained, coordinated and balanced way to have a long term benefit. Critically, research tells us that 'the policing of street prostitution needs to take account of those buying sex as well as those selling sex.'¹

Traditionally within Redbridge and elsewhere, prostitution related enforcement has been directed largely toward the women involved. Although the Borough did take this approach historically it has proved an ineffective way to reduce prostitution and its related effect on residents.

Following the work of the Routes Out of Prostitution Scrutiny Working Group, Cabinet have agreed that the focus of enforcement activity should shift towards those purchasing sexual services in the hope that this will reduce demand.

It can be very difficult to prove the offences listed above, therefore a significant amount of enforcement activity is now related to 'Achilles heel'² 'offences in order to disrupt prostitution related activity within the Borough. It is hoped that this approach will disrupt both the on and off street market.

¹ A Review of Effective Practice in Responding to Prostitution – Home Office

² Achilles Heel tactics are the use of all available legislation and powers to disrupt criminal activity.

The following work is planned to fulfil this objective:

- continue to take a strong multi-agency approach which focuses on tackling kerb crawling and off street establishments;
- use all available enforcement powers to reduce prostitution related anti-social behaviour such as the introduction of Public Space Protection Orders, and Fixed Penalty Notices for fly posting massage stickers and sex litter;
- continue to gather intelligence on both the men and women involved that would lead to the arrest and prosecution of those involved in the control of prostitution activity;
- Metropolitan Police Service targeting kerb crawlers for both soliciting and any additional illegal activity;
- Metropolitan Police Service will visit all alleged brothels to disrupt activity;
- multi-agency disruption operations;
- using Property licensing/housing legislation to identify premises used for the purpose of prostitution;
- use the Licensing application and review process to remove or refuse Special Treatments Licenses to premises which are linked to prostitution related activity.

Although Redbridge has adopted this enforcement approach to tackling prostitution, this is not as yet the case throughout London which may lead to displacement/and or a perceived increase in activity in the short term. In order to mitigate against this, the MPS Police Partnerships Inspector for Redbridge has been working closely with senior officers within the Metropolitan Police Service to develop a London wide response to prostitution. The aim of which is to ensure a consistent approach throughout the capital.

Environment

Over the life of the previous prostitution strategy multiple agencies have worked together to put in place a number of environmental improvements to reduce prostitution related activity. This focused on areas where women involved in prostitution are known to congregate and the locations where prostitution related activity takes place. These have included the following:

- the up-grading of street lighting in sixteen side streets;
- installation of fences and gates to control access to areas used for public sex;
- installation of a car access barrier on a Local Authority managed housing estate;
- upgrading of lighting on housing estates;
- removal and reduction of vegetation;
- the use of relocatable CCTV;
- issuing FPNs to reduce littering; and
- coating 600 lamp posts with sticker resistant paint to prevent the placement of stickers and advertising.

It is recommended that this following work will continue to achieve further environmental improvements.

- investigation/consultation into the implementation of one-way systems on side roads off Ilford Lane to increase traffic flow and reduce the number of stopping points to disrupt kerb crawlers.
- regular environmental audits to assess the impact of work already carried out and to make further recommendations;
- continued maintenance of vegetation in problem areas;
- cleansing;
- gating and fencing of new locations caused through dispersal as a result of previous work carried out;
- reduce the opportunities for landlords to allow their properties to be used as pop up- brothels.

Engagement-responding to local residents concerns around prostitution

It is understandable that although residents may have some awareness of the vulnerable nature of those involved in prostitution they are concerned about the impact that prostitution has on their neighbourhoods and on their quality of life.

It is essential to continue the current dialogue with residents to understand the impact prostitution has on them as well as using the information they share to improve our intelligence on where and when prostitution is taking place. Information from residents is particularly useful in identifying brothels.

To achieve this objective we will:

- continue to ensure brothels are visited and/or closed according to agreed processes to close brothels and disrupting the marketing around them;
- feed outcomes back to residents who do make complaints;
- use of variable messaging boards to highlight to potential kerb crawlers that what they are doing is wrong, and they face enforcement action;
- publicise outcomes of enforcement work to change community tolerance for kerb crawlers;
- engage with residents through Local Councillors, at Safer Neighbourhood Boards and Ward Panels;
- investigate whether non-confrontational community led behaviour change initiatives might be possible/appropriate to reduce local tolerance towards men who buy sex without putting residents at risk.

Exit-providing outreach, advocacy and support

Women involved in prostitution can be an extremely vulnerable and often marginalised group of women. They face multiple and complex needs such as homelessness, substance misuse, experiences of childhood abuse and/or childhoods in care. For the vast majority, entering into prostitution is not a conscious choice. Many enter into prostitution at a very young age; have early

experiences of abuse and violence; and have been groomed or forced into prostitution.

In Redbridge we are also encountering a large percentage of women involved in prostitution who have come to the U.K from Eastern Europe. These women may have been the victims of trafficking, or may have come to the country intentionally to work in prostitution. However, evidence suggests that some form of coercion or exploitation has been experienced by these women in the majority of cases.

In addition, women involved in prostitution experience high levels of sexual and physical violence on the streets and in their intimate relationships. Both the Government and the Mayor of London recognise that prostitution and sexual exploitation come under the umbrella term Violence against Women and Girls.

Many experience numerous physical and mental health problems and may be drug or alcohol dependent. The mortality rate for women involved in street prostitution in London is 12 times worse than the national average (Home Office 2004).

The different elements of support that need to be put in place for a holistic exit response require the involvement of multiple agencies including³:

- Specialist prostitution projects and services;
- Health (including sexual, reproductive and mental health services);
- Police;
- Housing Services;
- Drug and alcohol services;
- Adult Social services;
- Children's services; and
- Probation Services.

Additional agencies and organisations will also have to be involved to provide support for women who are not U.K residents, including:

- voluntary agencies with experience of working with trafficked women;
- the UK Border Agency ;
- other specialist trafficking agencies and organisations; and
- voluntary sector refugee and migrant organisations.

Redbridge alone has little capacity to commission specialised projects to work with the women involved in prostitution and has to date relied upon external funding to provide support services.

To achieve this objective we will:

- continue to provide limited outreach and advocacy support to women working on street;
- continue to provide advocacy support provided through the Borough VAWG services;
- encourage an Independent presence during brothel visits and prostitution operations;

³ A Review of Effective Practice in Responding to Prostitution – Home Office

- investigate all potential funding opportunities to increase support and advocacy;
- develop multi agency referral pathways to universal services for women involved in prostitution; and
- improve coordination and information sharing with neighbouring boroughs.

Appendix

Governance and ownership of the strategy

A 'Redbridge Prostitution Policy Group' has been established and is attended by:

London Borough of Redbridge:	Refuge (VAWG service)
Cleansing	Qalb (outreach team)
Enforcement Team	Metropolitan Police Service
Community Safety	

The group will meet bi-monthly in order to monitor progress, hold partners accountable for their actions and provide strategic oversight. This strategy group will report to the Community Safety Partnership Board, Business Support Group and provide updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy Group. Regular reports will also be provided to Cabinet.

This strategy and associated action plan have been extended to run for an additional year until March 2023 following a review of activities and work undertaken. It will continue to be reviewed on a yearly basis as part of the work of the Community Safety Partnership. It is recognised that work to tackle prostitution requires a long-term approach and that the principles established in this strategy may need to be continued over a longer period.

This strategy should not be taken forward in isolation; it is intrinsically linked to the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Safer Communities Partnership Plan.