

# Manchester Sex Work Strategy 2020-22

Following consultation with people who sex work and the organisations that work with them, we have changed our name from Manchester Prostitution Forum to Manchester Sex Work Forum. While the Forum supports the free use of the words 'prostitute' and 'prostitution' among people who sex work, because of the stigma attached to these words, we advise organisations and authorities use the terms 'people who sex work' and 'sex work'.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Manchester Sex Work Forum

The Manchester Sex Work Forum was established in 1998, recognising the need to bring together a range of voluntary and statutory organisations to take a multi-agency approach to sex work by:

- developing a strategy to address the issues that arise out of sex work\* in Manchester
- promoting co-operation and joint action in relation to sex work
- influencing agencies to improve service provision.

Since publishing its first strategy in 2001, members of the Forum have worked collectively to:

- support people who sex work to be safer and healthier
- take enforcement action against those who perpetrate violence against people who sex work and those who exploit individuals through sex work
- encourage those who sex work to report crimes and support them through the process
- empower people who sex work to engage with support services
- build upon existing networks, knowledge and experience to deliver more effective and relevant services
- support communities, including residents and businesses
- support those who sex work to exit, when they ask for that support.

The Forum is chaired by the Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council. The Forum and its subgroup comprise the following organisations:

- British Transport Police
- Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company
- Greater Manchester Police
- LGBT Foundation
- Lifeshare
- Manchester City Council
- Manchester Action on Street Health
- National Ugly Mugs
- Street Level
- The Men's Room

Owing to the diverse membership of the Manchester Sex Work Forum, we do not have a policy regarding legalisation of sex work.

\*Sex work is defined in terms of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation' (Weitzer, 2010:1)<sup>1</sup>

## The National and Local Picture

In the UK, 184 people involved in sex work have been murdered since 1990 – people who were part of our families and our communities. There have been 339 reports of violence or other crimes to National Ugly Mugs since it was established in July 2012 by people who sex work in Greater Manchester. The Forum is aware that due to underreporting, this figure is likely to be lower than the number of actual incidents that have occurred. We want everyone to feel safe to report crimes to the police or other specialist support services and be aware of how they can do this.

People who sex work come from diverse backgrounds, gender identities and orientations, and includes women, men, trans people, migrant people, and students. They come to sex work via different routes: some voluntary, some through necessity to survive, and some forced, coerced or deceived by others. Some people have turned to sex work to meet their basic survival needs, including money, food and shelter, while some are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. While the Forum will seek to support all who sex work, it will also work closely with partners such as Stop the Traffik and Programme Challenger to tackle those, often involved in organised crime, who commit offences such as human trafficking, modern slavery, and sexual exploitation.

Sex work sits within the context of the whole person; it is one aspect of an individual, something that they do, rather than defining who they are. This strategy therefore refers to people who sex work rather than sex workers. Forum members also recognise the strengths of those who sex work and take a strength-based and person-centred approach when providing services.

The Forum has seen many changes since it was established in 1998 both in terms of how and where people work. The advancement of technology, such as mobile phones, apps, social media, and the internet has revolutionised how we buy and sell goods and services, as well as how we communicate with each other. It has also brought about a greater degree of flexibility and to some extent anonymity to how people sex work. This in itself can bring about challenges connected to isolation, less awareness or contact with services, and a lack of understanding of the true picture of sex work in Manchester. While the Forum does not understand the whole picture, particularly prevalence, demographics and nature, it is keen to develop its understanding to ensure that appropriate services are available. The Forum will do this by keeping up to date with ethical research, particularly focusing on participatory action research. We also recognise that this is a constantly evolving and changing picture.

While sex work may take place on the streets, massage parlours, hotel rooms and homes in Manchester, many of those who sex work and their clients live outside Manchester and travel in for work. It is therefore important that the Forum is aware of and has good relationships with other local authorities, particularly those in Greater Manchester, and services within those areas.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide partners, practitioners and communities with an agreed framework in relation to sex work in Manchester, to collaboratively improve safety and life outcomes for people who sex work.

## Chapter 2 Our Previous Strategy 2016-19

The previous sex work strategy 2016–19 identified four priorities:

1. Protect those involved in or affected by sex work
2. Develop and maintain relationships, gather and share intelligence
3. Support positive and healthier choices to improve the health and wellbeing of people who sex work
4. Respond to and manage change.

Over the lifetime of that strategy, the following achievements were accomplished:

Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) conduct late-night outreach from a mobile unit. In 2016, MASH carried out a scoping exercise to map working patterns of women involved in street sex work. They conducted a number of all-night outreach sessions, which gave a snapshot of days and hours worked. Through observations it was evident that a number of women originally from Hungary were working until the early hours of the morning and being controlled by an identified woman who did not work, and took their money. Intelligence was forwarded to GMP, and after investigation, a human-trafficking ring was uncovered, with the women brought into the country under false pretences and identification taken off them. The perpetrators were subsequently prosecuted and the main offender received a prison sentence of 13.5 years. Following this, MASH improved their communication with migrant sex workers by using face-to-face interpreters. MASH also improved links with the Greater Manchester Modern Slavery Coordination Unit, and a pioneering multi-agency approach to working with migrant women was developed, Operation Gyrál. Strategies were developed to support the women and minimise their risk, taking a victim-focused approach. Women were informed of support available and their rights, with MASH and GMP speaking to women on the street to build rapport and trust. This partnership is having a positive impact and some of the barriers preventing women from speaking out have been removed.

As part of GMP's commitment to tackling Modern Slavery, the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Forum has evolved since its inception in 2015 to include many pan-Greater Manchester and international organisations that offer support to vulnerable and hidden communities. The NGO Forum is utilised as a platform to discuss emerging issues and share concerns and solutions. Manchester Sex Work Forum members are long-standing participants of the NGO Forum. They contribute regularly by providing intelligence, and raise issues such as barriers to reporting and the changing demographics. Through daily scanning of a number of sources, the Modern Slavery Coordination Unit tracks intelligence regarding sex working and exploitation. This allows activity to be targeted, be it proactive, covert or multi-agency. Both MASH and National Ugly Mugs (NUM) have trained a number of frontline officers from GMP to improve their understanding of the issues facing those who sex work and the services available. NUM have also provided training for local services on how to best use NUM to enhance their service in relation to the safety of people who sex work.

National Ugly Mugs (NUM) developed and built an email checker to increase the screening opportunities for people who sex work and improve their safety following the success of the NUM phone number checker where 32% of members refused specific appointments after matches on the number checker (NUM Survey 2016), and the

increase in internet-based sex work. NUM have always sought to innovate when responding to the changing landscape. Their members reported that they highly valued the number checker and felt that an email checker would be another useful tool to help them to screen for potential dangers. Through Manchester Community Safety Partnership funding, NUM built and implemented an email checker based on the model of the number checker. They promoted and tested this with Manchester members through leaflets, local services and social media promotions. This service is available nationally to all NUM members who sex work, and is also a useful tool for the police when conducting investigations.

Following the publication of The Student Sex Work Project report by the Centre for Criminal Justice at Swansea University<sup>2</sup> which revealed that up to 5% of respondents had been involved in some form of sex work, the Manchester Sex Work Forum established a task and finish group to raise awareness among students of available services. As part of the actions from this group, NUM hosted a group-training session for student services and organisations, including Lifeshare, aimed at improving staff awareness to enable them to better understand the needs of students who disclose they are sex working. The training was supported by Manchester's Community Safety Partnership, and developed with local sex work support services MASH and The Men's Room. A leaflet and online information were also produced, which included details of local sex work support services. Following this training, NUM also developed NUM-branded attack alarms, which were distributed to students through the university. The alarms and the link to the NUM website provided both personal safety tools and awareness-raising of sex work and safety with students.

The changing nature of male sex work was identified by The Men's Room in 2013. The development of the internet created a new platform for the provision and consumption of sexual services. Research was undertaken by The Men's Room to characterise the nature of online sex work in Manchester, identify outline figures for the number of men actively selling sex online, and increase the understanding of the needs of men involved in this work and the risks they face. Initial research identified over 300 men selling sex online in Manchester. Though some were known to The Men's Room through street outreach, the majority were not. Research also indicated that while the perception may be that working online is safer, it can be more isolating with no or limited access to support networks. Online workers were also subject to stalking and blackmail because clients had access to personal information about the worker. The findings from the research helped to improve The Men's Room service provision to ensure that they were meeting the needs of a very hidden group of young men at risk of violence and sexual violence.

## Chapter 3 Our Priorities for 2020/22

This strategy was developed by members of the Manchester Sex Work Forum in consultation with people who sex work, and has four priorities:

1. Support people who sex work to be safer, healthier and happier
2. Inform and influence policy and service design
3. Strengthen partnerships and improve information-sharing
4. Understand and respond to change.

### 1. Support people who sex work to be safer, healthier and happier

The Forum will support people who sex work to be safer, healthier and happier, empowering them to improve their health and wellbeing and reach their aspirations.

People who sex work, particularly those who work on-street, can lead chaotic lives with complex and multiple needs. Lack of suitable accommodation, substance misuse, poor health including mental health, violence, and exploitation, among other issues, can have a huge impact. Access to support, advice and treatment services is vital. Through drop-ins, outreach and online services, Forum members will provide support services for people who sex work to help them live safer, healthier and happier lives and improve their health and wellbeing. While doing so, we will take an Our Manchester approach by listening, recognising the strengths of individuals, and working together to support people to live better lives.

The Forum recognises that successfully supporting people who sex work to be safer, healthier, and happier involves taking a whole-person, person-centred approach. This includes providing opportunities to participate in enjoyable, positive, life-enhancing activities, including arts and culture, sports and events in a non-judgemental and safe environment. The Forum will work with partners to ensure that arts, culture, sports and leisure activities are inclusive and accessible to all.

The Forum will ensure that it is informed by the experiences of people who sex work through consultation about what safer, healthier and happier means to them, and will value their experiences in the future development and improvement of services. By engaging with people who sex work, policy and practice will be better informed and more effective in improving the safety and wellbeing of people who sex work in Manchester.

Leaving sex work may not be the desired outcome of everyone, especially in the short term, but for those who want to move away from this it can be a long and complex process. People who have had negative life experiences may have complicated and interlinked issues. These will need to be addressed, alongside ensuring that there are other viable opportunities for them. These issues can be around health, accommodation, money, addiction, and employment; therefore a robust multi-agency approach will be required to support these individuals to live the life that they desire and provide a positive outcome. During this time, services should continue to ensure that they are safe, and be available at the right time.



The Forum is aware that for a number of reasons people who sex work are less likely to report crimes committed against them. The Forum is keen to address this and increase both reporting and convictions. The Forum wants people who sex work to feel safe in reporting, and relationships of trust are essential for receiving reports of crimes. Organisations will take a victim-focused response when receiving reports of crime. The work of support organisations, including voluntary agencies and the police, are central to this. The Forum endorses the guiding statements of the National Policing Sex Work and Prostitution Guidelines,<sup>3</sup> which highlight:

- that the sex industry can be conducive to the abuse or exploitation of those selling sex
- the need for the police to build mutual trust and confidence, and encourage the sharing of information to improve safety
- that the police will work with partners to develop a better understanding of the extent and typologies of sex work
- the police focus is to reduce vulnerability and criminality, maximising safety, encouraging reporting, sharing information with partners, and targeting those who exploit or cause harm.

Enforcement action will be taken against perpetrators committing crimes against people who sex work, including violence, harassment, intimidation, and exploitation.

Forum member organisations will encourage people who sex work to report exploitation, violence, and abuse to the appropriate criminal justice, health, and support organisations, and provide appropriate support with the reporting process. The Forum will link in with the work taking place by the Community Safety Partnership and the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership to raise awareness of and tackle crimes that may be hidden, such as exploitation, modern slavery, and forced marriage.

Forum members will encourage organisations to sign up to and engage with NUM. Forum members will also encourage individuals who sex work to join NUM to report incidents and receive warnings about dangerous individuals where appropriate.

## **2. Inform and influence policy and service design**

Where possible, the Forum will look to inform and influence local policy in relation to sex work, championing and highlighting good practice and evidence-based approaches.

The Forum will seek to inform and influence the commissioning of services and service design relating to those who sex work.

The Forum recognises the importance of service-user voice within influencing. It will utilise mechanisms to enable the voices and experiences of those with lived experiences of sex work to be heard and represent the broad nature of sex work and the people involved in it.

The Forum will also connect with other key sector organisations nationally to understand trends in order to influence policy and service design.

Where possible, the Forum will collaborate with commissioners, commissioned services, and statutory partners to develop appropriate, person-centred approaches to supporting people who are homeless, begging, or rough sleeping and who are sex working or vulnerable to sex working.

### **3. Strengthen partnerships and improve information-sharing**

The Forum is mindful that services are continually developing and changing, adapting to external influences such as funding, policy, and local demographics. It is therefore important to maintain up-to-date information about services and develop and sustain strong working relationships between organisations.

In recognition of sex work being wider than a Manchester issue, the Forum will continue to develop relationships with other Greater Manchester statutory and voluntary organisations, including support services and local authorities.

The Forum will develop information-sharing mechanisms to share details of service changes, funding, consultations, policy changes, events, and good practice.

Links will be strengthened between Forum members, ensuring that a partnership response is taken when planning activity in relation to enforcement and compliance. The impact that any actions will have on those who sex work will be considered. Mechanisms will be developed for disseminating agreed communications.

### **4. Understand and respond to change**

Over the lifetime of this strategy, changes may occur that affect those who sex work, including where and how they work. The Forum will take a collaborative approach to managing change with task and finish groups established where appropriate.

We have already seen how the use of technology has impacted on the nature of sex work, particularly through the increased use of mobile phones and Adult Services Websites. The Forum is keen to develop a greater understanding of the prevalence and nature of sex work in Manchester, particularly the more hidden forms of sex work, such as cam sex, people using phones and phone apps, and students who sex work. This will allow the Forum to ensure that services are relevant and accessible. It will also help us achieve a greater awareness among those who sex work of the support and services available, including health and personal safety advice and reporting mechanisms.

The Forum is aware of the link between homelessness, begging and survival sex, with boundaries now being more blurred. While some outreach is taking place with people who are homeless, begging, and rough sleeping, the Forum is keen to learn more about people's needs and challenges. The Forum will undertake informal on-street consultation to gather this information, and adapt service delivery where relevant.

Each of these four priorities has an underlying theme of raising awareness of people who sex work and their rights, changing perceptions and reducing the stigma that seems to be attached to those involved in sex work.

## Chapter 4 How We Will Deliver

The Forum will:

- Develop an action plan to support the delivery of this strategy.
- Support and enable people who sex work to share their experiences and ideas.
- Meet regularly to oversee progress, identifying and addressing any challenges.
- Identify resources to help meet our priorities. This may include identifying sources of funding to commission research or activity.
- Establish task and finish groups where appropriate.
- Review the strategy annually to ensure that it remains current and reflective of the Forum's aims.

# References

<sup>1</sup> Weitzer, R (2010) Sex for Sale (2nd edition): Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry. London: Routledge

<sup>2</sup> Dr Tracey Sagar, Debbie Jones, Dr Katrien Symons and Jo Bowring (2015), The Student Sex Work Project, Centre for Criminal Justice, Swansea University

<sup>3</sup> National Policing Sex Work and Prostitution Guidance, National Police Chiefs' Council, January 2019

## Forum members

British Transport Police: <http://www.btp.police.uk/>

Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company:  
<http://www.cgmcrc.co.uk/>

Greater Manchester Police: <https://www.gmp.police.uk/>

LGBT Foundation: <https://lgbt.foundation/>

Lifeshare: <https://www.lifeshare.org.uk/>

Manchester City Council: <https://www.manchester.gov.uk/>

Manchester Action on Street Health: <http://www.mash.org.uk/>

National Ugly Mugs: <https://uglymugs.org/um/>

The Men's Room: <https://mroom.co.uk/>

# Notes



