

Manchester Sex Work Strategy 2025–28

Manchester Sex Work Forum

Our Manchester

Community Safety
Partnership

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Chair's introduction

The Manchester Sex Work Forum is pleased to introduce its Sex Work Strategy for the next three years. The Forum was set up in 1998 and we published our first strategy in 2001. Since then, our focus has been on the safety, health and wellbeing of those involved in or affected by sex work. Over the past 26 years, the Forum has seen many changes. These include changes in the nature of sex work and changes in how and where services are delivered. During these 26 years, relationships and strategies have been developed with positive results. This strategy contains details of some of the achievements that have taken place over the course of our last strategy.

The past five years have been especially challenging, as we have all had to deal with the impact of COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, Forum members continued to provide a service, adapting where necessary, to ensure that people were able to access services and support.

The Forum is also seeing challenges for service users and services connected to the cost-of-living increases. Increases connected to accommodation, fuel and food have seen people who had previously left sex work returning, only to find there are fewer clients. The Forum is monitoring the impact and adapting service provision where relevant.

Our current strategy details four objectives that we will focus on over the next three years:

1. Support people who sex work to be safer and healthier
2. Influence service design and local strategies
3. Strengthen partnerships and improve information sharing
4. Understand and respond to change

These priorities have been identified through consultation with service users and organisations working with people who sex work. Over the next three years we will continue to work together to achieve these objectives.

I would like to thank all members of the Forum for their continued commitment to supporting sex workers in the city and look forward to working together to achieve our shared objectives.

Councillor Joanna Midgley, Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council



Introduction

The Manchester Sex Work Forum

The Manchester Sex Work Forum was established in 1998 to bring together voluntary and statutory organisations to take a collaborative approach to sex work by:

- Developing a strategy to deal with the issues that arise out of sex work in Manchester
- Promoting partnership working and joint action
- Influencing agencies to improve service provision.

Since publishing its first strategy in 2001, partners 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
- Assist people who sex work to engage with support services
- Engage and consult with people who sex work about service design and delivery, learning from their experiences
- Deliver more effective and relevant services, building upon existing networks, knowledge and experience

- Support communities, including residents and businesses
- Support people to move on from sex work when they ask for support.

The Forum and its subgroup comprise the following organisations, with the Forum being chaired by the Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council:

- British Transport Police
- Change Grow Live
- Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Greater Manchester Police
- Greater Manchester Probation Service
- Greater Manchester Women’s Support Alliance
- LGBT Foundation
- Lifeshare
- Manchester Action on Street Health
- Manchester City Council
- National Ugly Mugs
- Our Room
- Service Users
- Sue’s Space
- Support for Student Sex Workers Project.

The Sex Work Forum reports to Manchester’s Community Safety Partnership www.manchester.gov.uk/makingmcrsafer

The national and local picture

In the UK, at least 199 people involved in sex work have been murdered since 1990; these were people who were part of our families and our communities.



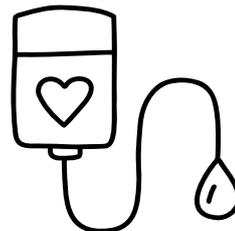
There have been 573 reports of violence or other crimes to National Ugly Mugs since it was established in July 2012 by sex workers in Greater Manchester. The true figure is likely to be higher due to underreporting.

People get involved in sex work via different routes, some voluntary, some through necessity to survive, while some are coerced or deceived by others.



Some people have turned to sex work to meet their basic survival needs, including money, food and shelter; others are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The Forum wants everyone to feel safe to report crimes to the police or other specialist support services and be aware of how they can report.

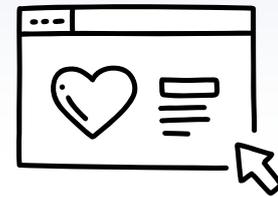


The Forum works closely with partners such as Stop the Traffik and Programme Challenger to tackle those who commit offences such as human trafficking, modern slavery, and sexual exploitation.

People who sex work come from diverse backgrounds, gender identities and orientations, and include women, men, non-binary, trans people, migrant people, and students.

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.

Forum members recognise the strengths of sex workers and take a strength-based and person-centred approach when providing services.



Accommodation continues to be an issue. While there have been success stories, the complex, long-term nature of some service users' needs means that organisations are still working with existing clients while taking on new ones, impacting on service capacity. More people are being placed outside Manchester yet still travelling into the city to access services. Travel costs, isolation and mental health are all issues.

Sex workers are a group that covers various identities. People involved in various types of sex work will have different experiences and have their own individual needs.

Advancement of technology such as mobile phones, apps, the internet and social media has revolutionised how we buy and sell services, and how we communicate. Selling sex online 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.



Sex work is defined as 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation.'¹



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 provided.

People working on the street usually have the most complex needs and remain the focus of the Forum.



Whilst 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.

1. Weitzer, R (2010) Sex for Sale (Second edition): Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry. London: Routledge.

Our previous strategy and what we have achieved

Our previous Sex Work Strategy 2020–22 identified 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

The past four years – innovation and achievement

Since the publication of our last strategy, progress has been made on several fronts. Below are examples of some of these achievements and their impact:

MASH

Over the past four years Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) has supported over 1,500 women across Greater Manchester. MASH supports women who are sex working or at high risk of sex working because of their experiences of poverty, homelessness, addiction, violence, or coercive relationships, and who may have to undertake 'transactional or survival' sex work.

MASH supports women to be healthier, happier, safer, and more able to identify and achieve their goals through gender, holistic and trauma-informed support.

MASH's services include outreach via its adapted campervan five nights a week, a drop-in centre five days a week, a sexual

and reproductive health clinic, counselling, and one-to-one casework to support with needs such as housing or substance misuse. This specialist support works. In its 2024 Annual Service User Survey, 93% of women reported improved wellbeing, 91% said they felt safer, and



93% of women reported improved wellbeing, 91% said they felt safer, and 88% reported feeling MASH supported them to identify and achieve their goals

88% reported feeling MASH supported them to identify and achieve their goals. MASH works across strong multi-agency partnerships to improve outcomes for women sex working and to upskill other agencies.

Sue's Space is MASH's service-user advisory panel, ensuring that women's voices are centred across all their work. Women's lived experience, insights and skills influence their own service design and drive wider change. Recent Sue's Space projects have included sMASH, which highlights the skills and strengths MASH women bring to employment. It raises awareness of the specific barriers they face, and puts forward suggestions for inclusive employment best practices.

Sue's Space also co-designed Trauma Informed Practice Training and co-delivered it to a range of organisations across Greater Manchester, including Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Probation Service, Manchester City Council, as well as a range of charities. 98% of attendees said they now felt better able to support a woman who has or might have sex worked, and that they now had an improved understanding of the needs of women who have experienced trauma.

MASH has also supported service users to contribute to a range of research and reports, including the Baird Inquiry, Solace Women's Aid's 'Women's Rough Sleeping Census', Agenda Alliance's 'How Women Facing Multiple Unmet Needs Experience Systems of Child Removal in the Greater Manchester Area', and Greater Manchester Combined

MASH has also launched its Thrive Project, which supports women moving on from sex work to achieve their goals in education, training, creative skills and employment

Authority's ten-year Gender-Based Violence Strategy, among many others.

Based on women's needs, MASH has expanded its services significantly over the past four years. This includes recruiting specialist workers who use their expertise in providing gender-informed and trauma-informed support for women accessing Housing First properties and women's temporary accommodation services; an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Adviser), who supports women to access justice through the Criminal Justice System; a RaSSO (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences) Pathfinder, which supports women to access mental health support following sexual violence; and a Young Women's Caseworker, who offers focused specialist support for women aged 18–25.

MASH has also launched its Thrive Project, which supports women moving on from sex work to achieve their goals in education, training, creative skills and employment.

Responding to gaps in geographical support, MASH is now also delivering outreach services to women sex working in Oldham, Rochdale and Bury.

Our Room

Across the lifetime of the last strategy, Our Room (formerly The Men's Room) helped over 200 individuals to address deep-seated, long-term complex issues. Their approach, putting creativity and fun at the core of their work, is a model for person-centred, trauma-informed support for marginalised individuals and communities. They have continued to develop this model and respond to change, no more so than when adapting to the biggest challenge of all – the pandemic.

Throughout this, they continued to offer a full service through repeated lockdowns, also working with their partners to deliver Everyone In. They are proud of the impact they have had through the Forum and elsewhere in influencing approaches to support marginalised and hidden communities.

Homelessness is one of the areas of greatest need. During the lifetime of the previous strategy, 34% of Our Room participants were either rough sleeping or in temporary or emergency accommodation at any one time. The provision of LGBTQ+ specific ABEN (A Bed Every Night) accommodation and the additional support Our Room can bring to its residents have made a huge difference to their ability to support

people who would otherwise have ended up in unsuitable accommodation or remained homeless.



Our Room could not deliver long-term positive outcomes without working closely with the range of agencies their participants need to access for support. They have excellent relationships with a host of organisations across Manchester in the voluntary and statutory sectors, including but not limited to Survivors Manchester, Centre Point, Back on Track, Barnabus, Shelter, 42nd Street, The Booth Centre, Manchester Urban Village Medical Practice, Manchester Healthwatch, Change Grow Live, MASH, The LGBT Foundation, Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, The Reach Clinic, Department for Work and Pensions, MCC Housing Solutions, the Council's Rough Sleepers Team, Manchester Community Safety Partnership, and Greater Manchester Police.

In addition, Our Room has strong partnerships with key cultural organisations in the city, supporting their participants to access opportunities for creative engagement and self-expression, including the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester Art Gallery, the Contact Theatre, and Home Theatre. This approach encourages participants

who would not otherwise participate in the city's cultural scene to do so; it also upskills more mainstream cultural institutions to become more accessible to a particular non-traditional audience. This joint approach enhances the service individual participants receive and enables inter-agency learning, joined-up approaches, and strategic service enhancement.

GMP

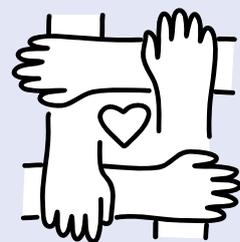
Many people who sex work are reluctant to report crimes to the police, including assaults, for a variety of reasons. To address this underreporting and improve the safety of those who sex work, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) focus on reducing harm rather than criminalising sex workers, allowing for a relationship of trust to develop. They undertake routine patrols to check on the welfare and concerns of women working on the street. They also run a 'police clinic' at the MASH drop-in centre. This offers people a safe and confidential space to report crimes and share concerns, providing the police with valuable information.

GMP is beginning to see the impact that working in partnership is having, and there has been an increase in intelligence and good results leading to arrests and convictions. In addition, operations such as Mantle and Vulcan focus on protecting people who are vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation and other forms of harm.

GMP is a key partner in work on ending violence against women and girls. All officers in GMP receive additional training in this area.

GMP have developed an understanding and response to modern slavery and people trafficking, working with the National Referral Mechanism to safeguard those in need. Over recent years, there has been an increase in pop-up brothels, utilising short-term rentals, and advertising through social media. GMP use intelligence to visit these premises, safeguarding those involved in sex work, and prosecuting those who facilitate, exploit and control the actions of others.

GMP work with the Sexual Offender Management Unit and their District Intelligence Team to identify individuals of concern and take appropriate safeguarding actions. Serious assaults on people who sex work are managed by detectives within CID, who vigorously pursue offenders. Specially trained officers work on the front line to support victims of rape and other serious sexual assaults.



National Ugly Mugs

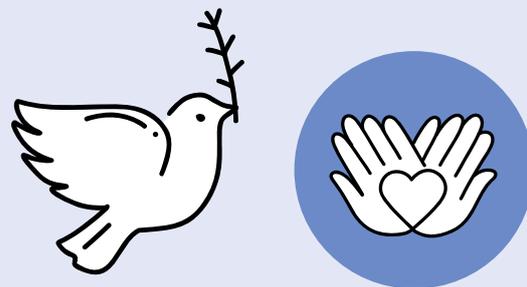
National Ugly Mugs (NUM) is a UK-based charity established in 2012 as part of a successful Home Office pilot. It has continued to diversify and adapt services to the direct needs of sex workers over the past 12 years. The experiences and insights of sex workers help shape NUM's services, and their strategic direction, which includes lived experience expertise as part of its staff team. NUM provides national reporting and alerting and the provision of hundreds of thousands of safety alerts per year to prevent violence.

It also offers individualised victim/survivor support via a Casework team of ISVAs; intelligence to police and National Crime Agency; emergency vouchers for food; digital tools such as the NUM checker for screening profile names, car registrations, phone numbers, and email addresses of potentially dangerous individuals who target sex workers; an online chat service; a sex worker-only online space; and in-person drop-in wellbeing services in Scotland, Manchester and London.

From 2020–2023, NUM received more than 2,000 reports of harm against sex workers. Its team of trained professionals is one of a kind, providing trauma-informed, individualised wrap-around services. With a growing membership of 10,000, of which 85% are individual sex workers (the remaining being venues and localised support services/organisations),

NUM has disseminated over three million vital safety alerts since its inception and is unmatched in its ability to reach an often hidden or invisibilised population.

With its qualified ISVAs and additional experience of backgrounds in policing, criminal justice, and IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Adviser) support, NUM can support sex workers in navigating the criminal justice system with confidence. It has working relationships with each police force within the UK and has specific points of contact with 'sex work knowledgeable' officers who assist in accessing crime reporting, which removes initial barriers to access for many sex workers.



NUM supports sex workers from 'report right through to court', assisting with special measures and tackling investigation stage attrition rates, which ensures the victims' code of practice is upheld throughout. NUM is an active member of the National Sex Work working group chaired by the police, and contributes to the NPCC sex work guidance for police professionals.

Our priorities for the next three years

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

1. To support people who sex work to be safer and healthier
2. To influence service design and local strategies
3. To strengthen partnerships and improve information sharing
4. To understand and respond to change

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

The safety of people who sex work is a priority.

People who sex work can have complex and multiple needs. Violence, substance use, money issues, poor health (including mental health), exploitation, lack of suitable accommodation, and other issues, can have a huge impact. Access to support, advice and treatment services at a time when it is needed is vital. Through drop-ins, outreach, and online services, Forum members will provide support to people who sex work to help them improve their safety, health and wellbeing. When providing support, Forum members will listen to service users, recognise their strengths, and work together to make safer and healthier choices.

The Forum will consult with people with lived experience about what safer and healthier means to them and how this can be achieved. This will be done through group discussions, surveys and one-to-one sessions. The Forum recognises that successfully supporting people who sex work to be safer and healthier involves taking a whole-person, person-centred approach.

The Forum is keen to learn more about the needs of all people who sex work. This includes:

- People who are non-binary and/or trans
- Those engaged in dancing, stripping and escorting
- Students
- Black, Asian, and minority ethnic sex workers
- People using technology such as apps, social media, cameras and the internet.

This will be done through engaging with people with lived experience, services and research. Forum members will review their service offer to make sure it is accessible and appropriate.

The Forum and its members will take part in discussions and events that aim to reduce the stigma attached to sex work.

It is recognised that this stigma can prevent people from reporting assaults and disclosing to friends, family and services that they sex work.

It can also prevent people who sex work taking part in research, resulting in inaccuracies when estimating the number of people engaged in sex work.

The Forum is aware that there is a link between child sexual exploitation and abuse and sex work. The Forum will improve its understanding of this link and the impact that adverse childhood experiences can have on people. Forum members will provide support or signpost survivors to appropriate organisations. Forum members will ensure that they have received appropriate training covering trauma-informed approaches, adverse childhood experiences, and child sexual exploitation.

Leaving sex work may not be the desired outcome of everyone, especially in the short term. For those who want to move away from sex work, it can be a long and complex process. People who have had negative life experiences may have complicated and interlinked issues that need to be addressed while considering other viable opportunities for themselves.

During this time, services will continue to ensure that they are available at the right time and provide a safe space. This will include creating and promoting opportunities around training and employment for anyone wanting to exit or develop different skills.

The Forum is aware that for various 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 to do this, relationships of trust are essential. 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 five guiding principles of the Sex Work National Police Guidance,² which highlights:

- The sex industry is complex, often stigmatised, and has many evolving typologies. It is often hidden from the wider public. This environment is conducive to the abuse or exploitation of those selling sex.
- The police will engage with sex workers to build mutual trust and confidence and encourage the sharing of information to improve safety.
- The police will start from a position that seeks to tackle exploitation, encourage the reporting of crimes against sex workers, and take enforcement action against criminal perpetrators.
- The police will seek to maximise safety and reduce vulnerability. They will work with partners to develop a problem-solving approach that tackles these issues.
- An evidence-based ‘what works’ approach will be used to enhance awareness of officers and partners dealing with this complex environment.

2. Sex Work National Police Guidance, National Police Chiefs’ Council, February 2024

It will ensure the focus is on vulnerability, safety and a consistent approach across the country.

Greater Manchester Police will carry out enforcement action against perpetrators committing crimes against people who sex work, including violence, harassment, intimidation and exploitation.

Forum members will encourage people who sex work to report exploitation, violence and abuse to the appropriate criminal justice, health and support organisations, and provide support with the reporting process. Details will be shared with Forum members of work being done by the Community Safety Partnership and the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership to tackle exploitation and modern slavery, including partnership operations and training.

The Forum will encourage organisations to sign up to National Ugly Mugs. Forum members will also encourage individuals who sex work to join National Ugly Mugs to report incidents and receive warnings about dangerous individuals where appropriate.

2. Influence service design and local strategies

The Forum recognises that service users' voices are key to the design and delivery of services and strategies. The Forum will ensure that those with lived experiences of sex work are consulted when developing its strategies and when members are designing their services.

The Forum will also endeavour to represent the broad nature of sex work and the people involved in it.

The Forum will look at informing and influencing local policies that impact on people who sex work, such as housing, health, community safety, and substance use. They will do this by engaging with policy makers, inviting them to Forum meetings and service-user Forums, and taking part in consultations.

Where possible, the Forum and its members will collaborate with commissioners, services and statutory partners to develop 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

Services are continually developing and changing, adapting to external influences such as funding, policy, and local demographics. Forum members will maintain up-to-date information about their services and share with service users and other Forum members.

Many people who live outside Manchester travel into the city to work. The Forum will discuss the establishment of a Greater Manchester Sex Work Forum with other Greater Manchester organisations, including support services, local authorities and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

The Forum will continue to develop information-sharing mechanisms to enable organisations to keep up to date with service changes, funding, consultations, policy changes, events and good practice.

The Forum will take a partnership approach when planning activity in relation to enforcement and compliance. This will involve engaging with support services. The impact that any actions will have on those who sex work will be considered.

4. Understand and respond to change

During the lifetime of this strategy, changes may occur that impact on people who sex work. This can include where they work and how they work. The Forum will work collaboratively to manage any changes. This will involve consulting with service users through discussions and surveys to look at issues affecting them, such as safety, location, patterns of work, changes in substance use, reporting mechanisms, health, and housing status. The Forum will also monitor the impact that any changes have on service users and service delivery.

Changes may also occur that impact on organisations and service delivery. Forum members will share details of these changes with partners, and solutions will be sought to minimise the impact on service users where possible.

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 service websites. The Forum is keen to develop a greater understanding of the prevalence and nature of sex work in Manchester. It will do so through research, engaging with people with lived experience, and other services. This will allow the Forum to make sure that services are relevant and accessible. It will also help us to undertake targeted awareness raising so those who sex work are aware of the support and services available.

The Forum will continue to monitor the impact of cost-of-living increases. Members will maintain up-to-date knowledge on services offering advice and support around debt, benefits and money.

How we will achieve our priorities

The Forum will:

- Develop an action plan to support the delivery of this strategy
- Engage with and consult people who sex work, listening to their views and experiences
- Meet regularly to oversee progress, identifying and addressing any challenges
- Identify resources such as funding to help meet its priorities
- Commission research and/or activity where relevant
- Establish task-and-finish groups where appropriate
- Review the strategy to ensure that it remains current and reflective of the Forum's aims.



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