

## Minutes of Sex Workers Liaison Group

16 November 2015 2.00pm

### Castle Buildings

**Attendees:** Simon Rogers - DOJ (Chair)  
Alison Redmond - DOJ  
Antoinette Cosgrave - Sex Workers Alliance  
Lucy Smith - Ugly Mugs  
Susan Semple - Belfast Trust  
Sgt Nick Williams - PSNI Sex Worker Liaison Officer  
Sgt Sharon Cromie - PSNI Sex Worker Liaison Officer  
Susanne Bradley (minutes)- DOJ

**Apologies:** Julie Wilson - DOJ  
Inspector Mark Bell - PSNI Human Trafficking Team

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1 Members of the group introduced themselves and the apologies were noted.

#### **2. Terms of reference**

2.1 Members confirmed that they were content with the terms of reference, which had been agreed prior to the meeting by email.

2.2 There was a general discussion about the purpose and remit of the group. Members agreed that the focus of the group was on combating human trafficking; Simon advised that any non human trafficking issues were outside the remit of the group. He noted that the SWLG could feed into the awareness raising strand of the DOJ's work, both by providing input to and comment on awareness raising resources for sexual exploitation and helping the DOJ to target new areas.

2.4 Lucy expressed disappointment that there was no representation from PSNI Human Trafficking Team present. The recent arrest of three sex workers had caused fear and concern within the sex worker community and might hamper efforts to co-operate with them to combat human trafficking. Lucy had hoped that the

meeting might give some clarity around the circumstances of that case which the Chief Constable had told the Policing Board was related to human trafficking. Susan advised that, since the arrests, she had seen an impact in the use of the Belfast Drop in Centre for Commercial Sex Workers. Both Lucy and Antoinette noted that the issue was undermining the relationship between sex workers and the PSNI, and affecting the level of trust that was being built.

**Action: Sergeant Williams will reflect the issues around recent arrests to the PSNI Human Trafficking Team.**

2.5 Lucy suggested that the researcher Dr Graham Ellison would be a useful addition to the group. Simon advised that the Department would be more than happy to engage with academics but did not think the group was the place for that. The Department could however engage with Dr Ellison, and others, separately.

### **3. Update on DoJ developments**

3.1 Simon provided an update on the human trafficking work currently being carried out by DOJ. It was agreed that this would become a standing agenda item. He advised that the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy had been published and focus was currently on completing secondary legislation required under the Act. Going forward the Human Trafficking Team would have to take account of the Anti Slavery Commissioner's plan, as well as the GRETA report which would be published in 2016, and work on any priorities highlighted in them.

### **4. General Discussion**

4.1 Lucy advised that in England and Wales CPS had issued guidance to state that individual sex workers should not be targeted by prosecutions, rather the focus should be on those who organise prostitutes and make a living from their earnings. She had contacted PPS to try and have something similar put in place in Northern Ireland. She reiterated the need for a message that sex workers are not the target.

4.2 Lucy expressed concern over a comment made at a meeting of the NI Policing Board which indicated that the Solas Trust was supporting a large number of trafficking victims. Simon confirmed that the only support providers contracted by

the Department were Migrant Help and Women's Aid; however, after the National Referral Mechanism support period ended, individuals were free to approach other organisations. Susan suggested that it would be useful to find out exactly who was providing support, as there may be legitimate concerns over unregulated organisations dealing with a vulnerable group.

**Action: DOJ to try to determine which groups are offering support to victims outside of the support contract, and what that support entails and to consider advice on standards.**

4.2 Lucy asked when "Leaving Prostitution – a strategy for help and support" would be published. Simon advised that an update would be sought from DHSSPS.

**Action: DOJ to seek an update on publication of strategy.**

4.2 Lucy expressed concern that to date neither Ugly Mugs nor Sex Workers Alliance had been invited to attend or take part in any human trafficking training involving the DOJ or PSNI, and advised that they would like to see the training materials which are used. Simon noted that the SWLG had just been set up – in future members could be engaged on any relevant training issues on sexual exploitation. In the interim the DOJ would look to identify the relevant training materials and seek constructive comment.

**Action: DOJ to obtain and share relevant training material.**

4.3 Antoinette was critical of, and asked for clarification on funding arrangements for, and the DOJ's role, in the REACH project.

## **5. Outreach event**

5.1 Simon asked how awareness of signs of human trafficking might be raised with sex workers. Susan suggested an informal event, to raise awareness and to try and make the Department / law enforcement more accessible and less intimidating. She felt a Q&A panel, and possibly a workshop session, in a neutral venue might be useful. Topics to cover might include the law on human trafficking and exploitation, risks and triggers. A separate event allowing the sex workers to meet the liaison officers would also be useful.

5.2 It was agreed that two or three short events to be held in February would be achievable, with the next meeting of the group in January to be used for planning. Lucy felt that this would be a useful start, as it may be too soon to push sex workers on reporting suspicions, but would begin to establish a relationship. Simon suggested that consideration could also be given at the January meeting to including information about the signs of human trafficking on eg. the Ugly Mugs website.

**Action: Susan to look at venue and dates for events in advance of next meeting.**

5.3 Lucy and Antoinette expressed their gratitude to the Department for setting up the group and the PSNI for providing officers to work with the sex worker community. They felt that both of these initiatives could help to build relationships with the sex worker community.

## **6. Date of next meeting**

6.1 A date for the next meeting in January will be circulated shortly.

**ANNEX A**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Sergeant Williams will reflect the issues around recent arrests to the PSNI Human Trafficking Team.</b>	<b>Nick Williams</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>DOJ to try to determine which groups are offering support to victims outside of the support contract, and what that support entails and to consider advice on standards.</b>	<b>DOJ</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>DOJ to obtain and share relevant training material on exploitation.</b>	<b>DOJ</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>DOJ to seek an update on publication of “Leaving Prostitution – a strategy for help and support” from DHSSPS</b>	<b>DOJ</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Susan to look at venue and dates for events in advance of next meeting.</b>	<b>Susan Semple</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Date of next meeting to be circulated</b>	<b>DOJ</b>