

Commercial Sexual Exploitation Cross Party Group

Minutes

Inaugural Zoom meeting for the new term of the Scottish Parliament

8th September 2021

6.00-8.00 pm.

Apologies

Roseann Cameron	Routes Out
Sophie Reymbaut	NHS Lothian
Alison Raybould (Major)	Salvation Army

Attendances

Rhoda Grant (Convener) MSP Scottish Labour

Elena Whitman MSP SNP

John Mason MSP SNP

Jeremy Balfour MSP Scottish Conservative

Jacci Stoye (secretariat) Individual

Beverley Johnston	Individual
Janet Warren	Individual
Bronagh Andrew	TARA
Chris Ringland	Evangelical Alliance
Heather Williams	Women's Support Project
Kat Banyard	UK Feminista
Diane Martin CBE	A Model for Scotland
Lisa Mackenzie	MurrayBlackburnMackenzie
Michael Veitch	CARE for Scotland
Lauren Agnew	CARE for Scotland
Ann Hall	Not for Sale in Scotland

Chris Hall	Not for Sale in Scotland
Teresa Little	Individual
Bryan Little	Individual
Agnes Martony	Individual
Agnes Tolmie	Scottish Women's Convention
Susan Mckellar	Scottish Women's Convention
Anne Martin	Individual
Linda Rodgers	Edinburgh Women's Aid
Steve Rawbone	SOHTIS
Pam Hunter	SAY-Women
Janice Wilson	Soroptimists

Minutes

Rhoda Grant (RG) welcomed members and apologies were noted.

Purpose of the CPG for Commercial Sexual Exploitation

The purpose of the CPG for Commercial Sexual Exploitation is to provide a forum for like-minded people who are concerned about commercial sexual exploitation, who want to see reform which results in an end to demand, who believe we should decriminalise victims, criminalise perpetrators and help women exit prostitution with holistic support. Everyone who joins signs up to this viewpoint.

Election of Office Bearers

RG proposed **Jacci Stoye (JS)** to continue to be secretariat and asked if there were any other proposals. There were not and JS was elected as secretariat. RG then asked JS to convene for the election of the convener.

JS explained to the group that **Ruth McGuire (RM)**, our previous co-convener, was currently off sick. JS expressed her sympathies and said that whilst **RM** could not be proposed co-convener in her absence, nonetheless, she would be delighted to do so on Ruth's return. **JS** then proposed **Rhoda Grant** as convener, which was seconded by **John Mason**.

Launch of A Model for Scotland

RG introduced **Diane Martin CBE (DM)** and **Kat Banyard (KB)** to present the campaign **A Modail airson Alba** aka **A Model for Scotland (AMFS)** to the group.

DM who is Chair of AMFS began the presentation.

The strength of the campaign will be based on its alliances and we're grateful to the CPG for taking this forward. I am a survivor of prostitution, which took place when I lived in London, and I was trafficked to the Middle East in my late teens. Whilst this experience was obviously foundational, what has really informed my views has been my direct service provision with women in prostitution over the last 25 years. As you are all aware, women in this oppressive system of prostitution and sex trafficking, face horrific violence from sex buyers, pimps, and traffickers. In addition, relationships with so-called 'boyfriends' fit the description of domestic violence with coercive control. Many women are further disadvantaged by having experienced childhood trauma, neglect, and sexual abuse, and for trafficked women, there are additional problems, such as having no recourse to public funding.

We want women in Scotland to have true autonomy and have the human right not to be bought and sold. When I worked with women in London, I encouraged several boroughs to sign up to a policy statement based on Glasgow's that prostitution is violence against women. This resulted in a new approach where the criminal focus was on sex buyers and support was provided for the women. But as you are aware, unless there is legislation this is always subject to change, and we must begin again.

In Scotland we are fortunate that we have a government policy in Equally Safe that prostitution is violence against women, but sadly this is only on paper. The law is currently unable to treat it as such, where the perpetrators are punished, and the victims are supported, and *not* punished. There is just no other strand of violence against women and girls' strategy where the perpetrators are not criminalised, and the women are treated in this way. This needs to change. Currently the UK is not a hostile environment for pimps, traffickers and pimping websites, there is no accountability, and this has got to change.

We want a model for Scotland that addresses demand and provides the resource support for women exploited in prostitution and sex trafficking. That must be at the heart of it, that women get the support they need, and not just to exit, but we want sustained holistic support, involving housing, health and community.

DM hands over to **Kat Banyard (KB) Director of UK Feminista**

KB's presentation provided an overview of the campaign strategy:

A Model for Scotland was launched on Monday 6th September, it is a campaign for prostitution law reform, the campaign is an alliance of organisations and we're delighted that the CPG is part of this.

KB outlined the problem as follows:

Scotland's prostitution laws are outdated and unjust. Victims of sexual exploitation should be supported, not sanctioned. Legal pimping websites facilitate and incentivise sexual exploitation. A recent parliamentary inquiry by the CPG for CSE found this to be the case. Demand from sex buyers drives sex trafficking and currently there is no attempt by the law to deter sex buyers, only to hide it away out of sight. Due to the great harms perpetrated by prostitution there is an impact on society as a whole. The demand for prostitution is a barrier to women's equality.

KB outlined the solution as follows:

To shift the burden of criminality off women who are exploited through prostitution and on to those who perpetrate and facilitate this form of violence against women. We need to reform Scotland's laws, so they work to deter demand from sex buyers, deliver justice to victims, and hold exploiters to account.

KB outlined the specific demands that A Model for Scotland calls for:

Firstly, to decriminalise victims of sexual exploitation and wipe previous convictions for soliciting from their criminal records. Secondly, to criminalise online pimping, thirdly to criminalise paying for sex and finally, to provide comprehensive support and exiting services for victims of sexual exploitation.

KB outlined why the campaign has been launched now:

The reason the campaign has been launched now is because there is an opportunity and an obligation on the government to act, because they are already committed and have *said* they are going to act.

Ash Denham, the Minister for Community Safety has already stated the following:

'We are committed to develop a model specifically for Scotland that will reduce the harms of prostitution, support women to exit it, and crucially, challenge men's demand for purchasing sex.'

Furthermore, the **SNP promised in their 2021 manifesto** to do the following:

'We will develop a model for Scotland to tackle this form of violence (*ie prostitution*) against women and girls, and consider how aspects of international approaches which seek to challenge men's demand for prostitution would be best applied in Scotland.'

The campaign

We are an alliance of organisations who want to see reform which is well overdue. We want to build on this and have a really strong core for reform. The launch was featured well in newspapers and on the BBC website and our task going forward is to mobilise people and channel the momentum to get MSPs to act.

Individuals can email their MSP; it's critical that we do so. Please encourage others to do so. Please sign up on the website emailing list. Please stay in touch and take action.

DM summed up the presentation

The Alliance is at the heart of the campaign and the lives of exploited women. Whatever area you are involved in we need each other. It's a tough area but a sector of tenacious people who are fighters on behalf of others, who challenge injustice and develop victim centred solutions. Its also a sector where we get to witness women healing and empowering themselves and finding safety, healing, and recovery. The success of this campaign will be dependant on the alliance and partnership working and I thank you for being a key partner.

RG thanked Diane and Kat and introduced and welcomed our MSPs, Elena Whitman and John Mason (and later Jeremy Balfour when he arrived). She suggested that the members present should now introduce themselves, which they did.

RG asked the group for their ideas on topics for the CPG or questions for Kat and Diane.

The following questions and comments were asked by the members:

1. How we can take the message to young people, particularly at universities?
2. I am thinking of putting a motion before a conference, I think it would be useful prior to such events that we held something to have some speakers to come and talk the topic through, because we have this problem calling prostitution 'work'. The pro prostitution view seems to be driven by young women, who feel this is a chosen a profession. There seems to be a gap in education where women are not getting the message. We need materials to hand out too.
3. The pro sex work lobby have put time and effort going into universities putting forward their inaccurate rhetoric. I know it can be overwhelming where big organisations, like Amnesty International, do not hold the same viewpoint as us. It can be daunting, but we must keep coming back to the fact that we are part of a group, and the alternative is doing nothing, and we can't take that option. We must respond to the myths, and we all know the answers. They may have the money, but we have the truth.
4. One of the strengths of the campaign is that we are rooting this in inequality and young people think that this battle has already been won, but there's a lot of inequality out there and its not empowering. Also, if you think about social media, we're in a little bubble, and what we see is not what a lot of people think. The majority understand the issue, but how you get that silent majority to speak up?
5. The point about how to reach young people is important, but I keep coming back to the question 'who do we need to convince to get this legislation across the line?' We're not going to convince every single person and we don't need to convince every single person. We need to convince enough people and the right people. We need to convince MSPs, the government and key constituent groups. So, as you said, getting the unions on board would be good and we'll support you with leaflets and organising events, whatever it takes to help you. There is a pro prostitution lobby who are very noisy and intimidating on social media, but the point made earlier about only a small minority being on social media is important. When we confront the public about the reality of women's lives, who are prostituted and trafficked, and put into the spotlight the men who are abusing them, then it becomes a lot harder to argue that what these men are doing are just ordinary consumer actions. Because of course, they're not.

6. We're in an unusual situation because we are going in the same direction of travel that the government are already are going. Have we got any idea what strategy our opponents are likely to use? What narrative should we use with MSPs who find themselves confronted with organisations who claim to represent vulnerable women and tell them that what we are proposing is a bad idea, because this is happening. And would this be a free vote issue?
7. **RG** said she would be surprised if this were a free vote because it is about equality and violence against women. We need to win the hearts and minds of constituents because MSPs are influenced by that. We need to get people on side, we know the pro prostitution arguments are not the case, and we need to be on the front foot.
8. **JM** said we have 43 new MSPs, one third of the total, we don't know where our new MSPs stand on this. So, although it is SNP policy, I think it is fair to say there wouldn't be 100% enthusiasm in the SNP, in the government, or amongst the civil servants that this is happening. The fact that it is not in the programme for government this year is significant. Hopefully, it will be in year 2, but there is no guarantee of that. Anything that people can do to lobby MSPs will be helpful. In the Irish campaign a lot of people had meetings in village halls etc winning people over, I think that was a really good model.
9. I wanted to add to the list of useful organisations that were mentioned earlier, and reflecting on the Irish experience, I think the councils were very powerful alliance partners in their campaign. I brought this up before and it was suggested that we would need to 'check the temperature' before we put a motion out for councils to vote on. That's a way this group could help, people could write to their councillors as well as their MSPs. Also, when I was watching the news reports for the launch, there were instances when the pro prostitution lobby countered with their untrue myths, which went out with no-one being given the opportunity to rebut them. We need to think about how we can create opportunities to respond.

RG pointed to the link that **KB** had put in the chat for people who wanted to get involved. **RG** asked if any CPG members might be willing to go along to speak to organisations, such as Unions or Freshers' weeks. As an action **RG** asked **JS** to send a note round to see if anyone would feel confident in speaking at such events, so we can have a number of speakers available.

JS offered to put that request out on the googlepage.

RG then asked the meeting to consider the number, situ, and topic of meetings as per the agenda. The group decided on quarterly meetings as before. **RG** then asked the group about suggested topics.

1. There was a suggestion to have journalists and media experts to come and talk to the group on how we might be able to utilise the media for our campaign. We could also use this as an opportunity to educate the press on some of the arguments against the pro prostitution myths, so that they can perhaps begin to challenge their rhetoric in interviews.

2. A member wanted a meeting on surrogacy with the law commission.
3. There was a suggestion to contact Equally Safe in Higher Education with regard to young people.
4. Also, Women's Support project are having an event in conjunction with COSLA on their exiting pathway, using their *OUTSIDE* resource, which they would be willing to share and come and talk about.

RG said that looked like four good topics for our meetings, although surrogacy is not our normal remit.

1. The suggestion concerning surrogacy was explored further. The law commission have been lobbied by the intended parents who want to speed up the process of having legal parenthood awarded to them. However, the suggestion is to make them the legal parents as soon as the baby is born, giving the surrogate mother only 2 weeks in Scotland to go to court (after giving birth) should she wish to keep the baby. There is little recognition that the surrogate mother is often a vulnerable woman, and her rights appear to be being overshadowed.
2. The choice of surrogacy being a suitable subject was defended: It was pointed out that this is a sexual body and there may be commercial exploitation of it. There is no other CPG that fits this issue and there is no research on what happens if the mother's body is harmed. This is a public health issue.
3. **RG** picked up some other suggestions from the chat: the current policing approach to commercial sexual exploitation; the operation & regulation of lap dancing clubs; pimping websites; pornography - its harms and regulation/legislation; men's demand for commercial sexual exploitation; support and exiting services for women exploited in Scotland.
4. Another concerning emerging issue is the platform OnlyFans which can act as an online means to recruit and exploit women for CSE. Students in particular would be a high-risk group for this type of online grooming. Warnings of the dangers of this could be given in universities (whilst also pushing back on the university toolkits) and trying to reframe the narrative in support of a model for Scotland.

RG asked the group if they were happy for her and **JS** to work on a programme with these topics included? The members displayed their thumbs up.

JS had 2 items on the AOB: firstly, to send out the minutes and agree them by email so they could be sent to the parliamentary office within the 30-day remit for an inaugural CPG meeting.

Secondly, whether she could sign on behalf of the CPG for CSE on a consultation for a lap dancing club or a similar consultation that covered CSE. This was agreed by members provided it was with the approval of the convener.

RG reminded the group to write or see their MSPs regarding the campaign and to report back to us whether their MSP was for or against our proposals for reform.

JS asked about the date of the next meeting and whether it would be held on Zoom or at the Scottish parliament. **RG** suggested we could ask members on the googlepage what they preferred but zoom for the next time and maybe a hybrid meeting may be a preferred option when we're allowed back into the parliament.

RG suggested Wednesday 24th November 6.00-8.00 pm for the next meeting.