

# Sex Work Research Wales

2010-2014

**Summary of Findings**

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# 'So you think you know me'?

## My name is Ellie. I'm 36 years old and I'm a sex worker.

You may call me by one of my many other titles - there are plenty to choose from. Prostitute, Call Girl, Working Girl, Escort, Hooker, Whore, maybe a few I've not heard myself.

You'll probably be familiar with the kinds of places I work too. Massage Parlour, Health Club, Brothel, Sauna, Gentleman's Club.

You might euphemistically acknowledge what I do as being "The Oldest Profession", which I think has a nice sense of tradition about it.

I'm sure you have your own opinions on what this means about me, my life, and my person. I'm being exploited, I'm exploiting men; I'm a victim of society, I'm from a broken home, I'm a nymphomaniac. I am immoral, wanton, ungodly, shameful.

I'm a cold hearted bitch who hates men, I'm a cold hearted bitch who hates women, I'm a broken hearted bitch who hates myself; I'm damaging equality and the women's' movement - I'm reinterpreting feminism, I'm anti-feminist, I'm empowered as a woman.

I have no power and no voice; I need help, I should be helped - I'm beyond help. I'm using my sexuality, I'm abusing my sexuality, it's my body, I can use it how I like; I ought to have more respect for my body and myself.

I am something to be pitied, scorned, avoided, criminalised, marginalised, shunned, ignored. It's not something a nice girl would do.

I must be damaged...

That's an awful lot of opinions to have about someone you've never even met, especially when I'm really just a nice, ordinary girl - so ordinary in fact, that I'm certain you wouldn't recognise me even if we sat right next to each other on a bus.

If we allow ourselves to look past the stereotyping, the reality is - as ever - far more interesting.

*(Project Peer Researcher)*



# Acknowledgements

Sex Work Research Wales (SWRW) is a four year research project that is led by Gibran UK in Partnership with Swansea University. The project is funded by the Big Lottery Research Fund; we are very grateful to the Big Lottery for funding this project.

SWRW has made an important contribution to advancing the knowledge and understanding of sex work in Wales. The information in this report will be valuable to national and local governments, policy makers, stakeholder organisations and front line professionals.

This project would not have been possible without the contribution of agencies, organisations and individuals across Wales. We are very grateful for this support and thank everyone who gave up their time, provided their expertise and participated so enthusiastically in the project.

- **Over 200 agencies and organisations took part in the research**

We also take the opportunity to thank the members of the community who took the time to assist the project in understanding their perceptions on sex work in the Swansea area.

- **58 residents and businesses in the Swansea area took part**

We would like to thank our peer researchers, who fully joined the project team and were instrumental to the success of the project, carrying out peer-led research within both the sex work and wider communities; their contribution has been truly invaluable.

- **10 peer researchers joined the project team (as sex worker or community representatives)**

Lastly and most importantly, we acknowledge our fantastic research participants who shared with us openly and honestly their stories, opinions, views and experiences to help us understand about sex work in Wales.

- **Over 100 sex workers took part in the research**



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# The SWRW Project Team

**Emma Jones**, Lead Researcher Gibran (UK) Ltd has considerable experience and understanding of working with women in the Criminal Justice System, Emma project managed the research.

**Dr Tracey Sagar**, Associate Professor of Criminology, Centre for Criminal Justice and Criminology at Swansea University provided strategic research direction and expertise as Principal Investigator.

**Debbie Jones**, Researcher with the Centre for Criminal Justice and Criminology at Swansea University provided essential research expertise and led the development of the project's methodological framework.

**Louise Clark**, Research Associate with Gibran (UK) Ltd, brought to the project her skills and experiences of supporting sex workers and in developing training to enhance knowledge and understanding.

The team adopted an *action research* ethos to the SWRW project, putting the voices of community and front line workers at its centre. In this way the project aimed to facilitate a sense of community ownership and community belonging. The project trained 4 sex workers in basic research skills who became peer researchers with the project along with 6 members of the wider community.

Peer researchers came from a variety of different backgrounds; none of the researchers had previous experience of working on a 'live' research project before joining the SWRW team. The dedication of our peer researchers who undertook research training and carried out qualitative research within their respective communities has been astonishing.

Although individual peer researchers are not named here (the project is committed to participant anonymity) we acknowledge their substantial contribution to this project. The contribution of these individuals has been, without doubt invaluable and has steered project activities. One of our Peer advisors on the project even undertook the role of 'Executive Producer' on the film project.



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# Executive Summary

## Aims and goals of the study

This report presents the findings of the Sex Work Research Wales (SWRW) project which was carried out over a four year period (June 2010-June 2014). The overriding aim of the research project was to provide new knowledge on sex work in Wales generally, and working in one area (identified as having the potential to most benefit from the input of the research project) carry out in-depth research with service providers and members of the sex worker community as well as collating the views and opinions of the wider community. The purpose of this was to explore in detail the needs of sex workers and the responses of service providers within a community context. In doing so, SWRW also set out to explore the capacity for project work to enhance multi-agency working and service development.

### **SWRW research questions:**

1. In which geographical areas are sex workers located in Wales?
2. Are sex workers the target of operational policing in Wales?
3. In which areas of Wales is sex work a community issue?
4. Which areas of Wales respond to sex work through a multi-agency partnership approach?
5. What are the perceptions of sex workers on service provision and is there a need for multi-agency work?
6. By comparing and contrasting geographical areas with significant sex worker populations, can good work on the ground be identified and shared?
7. Can engagement with services for sex workers and service users lead to mutual empowerment?
8. Can the voices of the wider community and the sex worker community make an important contribution to policy and practice?

# Methodology

This study was underpinned by an Action Research ethos: the study intended to provide an inclusive process for those taking part in the research with the aim of producing findings that would inform policy and practice. The study adopted a two phase approach:

Phase 1 aimed to geographically map the areas of Wales where sex work is located, consider the numbers of sex workers in Wales, find out how sex work is regulated across Wales, and assess at local level the extent to which sex work is raised as a community concern. Phase 1 also considered the extent of sex work focused multi-agency work in Wales, specialist service provision, as well as the opinions of sex workers about service provision.

Phase 2 (A) focused on the South Wales area (identified as being the area in Wales where sex work is most concentrated). In this phase, data was collated from service providers in the cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

Phase 2 (B) worked closely with organisations and sex workers in the city of Swansea.

A multi methods methodological approach was adopted in both phases of the project:

- Quantitative tools in the form of questionnaires were used with service providers, statutory agencies, members of the community and sex workers.
- Freedom of Information Requests were made to four police forces in Wales.
- Three 'one day counts' of internet and newspaper sources also took place to identify off street sex work activity.
- Semi-structured interviews were carried out with service providers, stakeholder agencies and sex workers as a way of exploring the meaning and depth of their experiences.
- The project worked with gatekeepers where appropriate and interviews with sex workers were facilitated through a number of 'engagement events' with the assistance of Cyrenians in Swansea and other local stakeholder service providers.

## Main Findings: Phase 1

- Sex work is identified in all 22 local authority areas of Wales. However sex work is most concentrated in the areas of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.
- Off street sex work to a significant extent is invisible to law enforcement agencies, community safety partnerships and service providers in Wales.
- Male and transgender sex workers are least visible in Wales; there is negligible acknowledgement of male sex work or transgender sex work.
- There is a significant off street internet enabled market that is unacknowledged in Wales.
- SWRW suggests that there are at least 2471 sex workers in Wales.
- Responses to the Freedom of Information requests suggested that sex work is not a priority for law enforcement agencies across Wales.
- Sex work was only raised as a cause of community concern in 6 Welsh wards. Within these wards partnership work is in place and the police act proactively.
- Multi-agency partnership work that focuses on sex work specifically only takes place in Cardiff and Newport. Swansea is developing a multi-agency response to sex work.
- Sex worker responses indicate the need for a multi-agency approach to address wide ranging needs. However, responses also emphasise the need to provide non-judgemental service provision within a multi-agency framework.

## Main Findings: Phase 2 (A)

- A lack of funding and resources presents a serious limitation to the development of multi-agency work in Swansea and to the expansion of multi-agency work in Cardiff and Newport.
- Overall, stakeholder agencies adopt a harm-reduction approach focusing on the vulnerabilities of sex workers and their safety, sexual health and general wellbeing.
- There are many examples of innovative partnership work across the three cities; however support with housing and advice on access to benefits needs to be at the forefront of multi-agency / partnership work.
- There is a need to develop a 'South Wales' response to sex work to enable intelligence and information to be shared and mechanisms need to be put in place to facilitate the development of good practice across the region.

## Main Findings: Phase 2 (B)

- Service provider and service user engagement can achieve many positive and often empowering outcomes.
- The voices of the community, including the sex work community, have much to contribute to the development of policy and practice and indeed the development of multi-agency responses to sex work.
- Stigma and the fear of being judged were highlighted as key obstacles to sex workers accessing services and in reporting violence.

## Key recommendations

- There is a need across Wales to develop a service provision that reaches out to internet enabled sex workers.
- There is negligible acknowledgement of male and transgender sex workers in Wales. Male and transgender sex workers need to be recognised by services and also within strategic sex worker policy development.
- Sex work is primarily a welfare issue, not a policing issue, in Wales and should be addressed through a harm reduction approach.
- Providing access to secure housing, benefits and employment opportunities should be at the forefront of multi-agency partnership work.
- The stigma associated with sex work needs to be proactively tackled within individual stakeholder services and within multi-agency partnership work.
- There is a need to develop and appropriately resource specialist sex worker services.
- 'Ugly Mugs' should be rolled out across Wales.
- A regional response to sex work in the South Wales area should be developed to facilitate the sharing of intelligence and innovative practice.
- Given that sex work takes place in all local authority areas, consideration should be given to developing All Wales good practice guidance.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Definition of Terms

In England and Wales selling of sex for financial gain is defined as ‘prostitution’ by consecutive governments in legislation, policy and guidance (see for example: Street Offences Act 1959; Sexual Offences Act 2003; Coordinated Prostitution Strategy 2006; Policing and Crime Act 2009; Effective Responses to Prostitution, 2011). However, the term prostitution has been denounced as one that attracts stigma and discrimination; placing people who sell sex at the margins of civil community and thus denying individuals the right to full citizenship (O’Neill, 2007).

**SWRW** uses the term ‘sex work’. In recent years the term sex work has been interpreted to incorporate a wide variety of sexual services (see, Sanders, 2007). Whilst acknowledging this, SWRW focuses only on those individuals (male, female and transgender) who sell sex for financial gain/goods or survival (e.g. accommodation). This limitation is in accordance with the terms of the research funding, it is also necessary given the breadth of an ‘All Wales’ project and limited resources.

The project focused on street based sex work and off street sex work. The definition of street based sex work is taken from the Street Offences Act 1959. For the purposes of this project, off street sex work included working from a brothel as defined in the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003; the selling of sexual services in premises commonly described as massage parlours and saunas; selling sexual services from private premises; internet enabled sexual services such as escort agencies and individuals who are thought to be self-employed sex workers.

## 1.2 Impetus for the Project

The first decade of the new millennium was marked by a flurry of policy and legal reform which overhauled the approach to sex work in England and Wales. The Home Office ‘Coordinated Prostitution Strategy’ (2006) in particular sought to provide justice for ‘all’. The

SWRW project was developed in 2008-2009 in the wake of the *Coordinated Prostitution Strategy*:

- The 2006 Strategy estimated the numbers of sex workers to be approximately 80,000. However, figures for Wales are subsumed within this estimation – there is no data separating Wales from England.

**SWRW** set out to discover the geographical areas in Wales where sex work takes place and to locate sex workers across Wales who are engaged in *both the on street and off street markets*. In particular, locating sex work that is enabled through the internet and newspapers was considered to be very important given that off street work to a significant extent resides outside of national policy (Sanders and Campbell, 2007).

- The 2006 *Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* predominantly focused on visible street based sex workers who were perceived to be victims of sexual exploitation. To assist sex workers, the Strategy recommended support mechanisms to enable sex workers to leave the streets. Following on from this, the Policing and Crime Act 2009 introduced section 17 engagement orders, compelling sex workers by virtue of a court order to engage with support services to identify routes into sex work and routes out of sex work.

However, and somewhat controversially, in seeking to protect the community from the nuisances associated with street based sex work, sex workers who did not engage with services and who breached their court order ran the risk of reverting back to the status of community ‘offender’ and facing the ‘full force’ of the law (see Home Office, 2006; Policing and Crime Act 2009).

While support for sex workers is welcomed, there is an overriding concern about the compulsory nature of section 17 engagement orders and the ability of criminal justice interventions to ‘exit’ sex workers from the streets (Sagar, 2010). Also, there is tension regarding the *victim status* of sex workers and the use of the criminal law against sex workers to protect the community (Phoenix, 2007). These tensions formed part of the impetus for the SWRW project.

**SWRW** sought to carry out a geographical mapping exercise to understand how sex work is regulated across Wales and the extent to which sex work negatively impacts on communities in Wales. The project also aimed to carry out in-depth empirical research in one specific area of Wales within the sex worker community, wider community and with service providers to explore community disaffection towards sex workers.

- Additionally, the 2006 Strategy emphasised the need to provide support to sex workers within a multi-agency capacity, but there were several problems, not least of which was the actual existence of multi-agency partnerships and resources at the local level to carry out support work (Sagar, 2007).

**SWRW** sought to ascertain the prevalence of multi-agency work in Wales as well as identifying service provision on the ground in an attempt to enhance knowledge about support mechanisms at the national and local level in Wales.

- The policy and legislative reforms that took place within the first decade of the new millennium present a zero tolerant approach to sex work. However, little is known about how the aims and objectives of the 2006 Strategy have panned out at the local level. The Coalition government did offer new guidance on Effective Responses to Prostitution in 2011, but a variety of arguably conflicting approaches were held up as effective responses. The 2011 document demonstrates very clearly the discretion afforded at the local level but this also means that neighbouring areas may adopt completely different approaches and these approaches may not always complement each other, and could in fact impact negatively on each other.

**SWRW** sought to carry out comparative work at the local level in Wales with the aim of highlighting good work on the ground to assist the development of policy and good practice.

- The 2006 Strategy prioritised 'exit' as the best way to reduce the numbers of sex workers. Similarly, the 2007 Corston Report also emphasised the need for a distinct approach working with women in the Criminal Justice System and recommend that it should be mandatory in every regional

resettlement plan for women to develop Pathway 9 to support women who have been involved in prostitution. The report made it clear that to achieve this, local responses had to be strategic and holistic. Baroness Corston recommended better use of community sentences for women, and 'offence specific' solutions such as 'prostitution referral orders', delivered by an expert advisor. Very importantly, with regard to exit work little evidence exists to indicate what works for whom and in what circumstances at the local level.

**SWRW** sought to delve beneath the surface and explore in detail the experiences of one area in Wales to reveal the perspectives of stakeholders, service providers and sex workers who work both *on* and *off* street, and in doing so provide some much needed context.

- Finally, whilst seeking to empower sex workers, the 2006 Coordinated Prostitution Strategy was widely criticised for not including the voices of sex workers sufficiently (O'Neill, 2007; Sagar, 2010).

**SWRW** sought to bring the voices of members of the wider community and sex worker community firmly into the policy arena. The project understood that the voices of the community, sex workers and those of front line service providers are pivotal to establishing effective services.

The voices of ALL members of the community are central to SWRW. The research team includes peer researchers from the sex work community and wider community. Team peer researchers:

- steered project work
- assisted the project to engage with sex workers
- provided peer mentoring support to other sex workers
- undertook research training
- designed, conducted and analysed research with the community
- carried out in-depth interviews with other sex workers
- took the helm with the creation of a project film
- assisted in the writing of this report

### 1.3 Aims of the Study

The main aim of the SWRW project is to advance knowledge and understanding on sex work in Wales and to enhance support for sex workers through an empowering participatory action research framework which brings the voices of sex workers, community and stakeholders into the policy development arena.

The SWRW project was divided into two phases. Phase 1 consisted of research carried out by the SWRW team which aimed to:

- Locate areas in Wales where sex work is most prevalent
- Discover if sex workers are the target of police operations in Wales
- Identify communities within which sex work is a contested issue
- Identify multi-agency sex work focused partnerships at local level in Wales
- Consider sex worker service provision from the perspectives of service users (identifying the need for multi-agency collaboration)
- Identify a geographical area in Wales where sex work was most prevalent with the aim of exploring multi-agency partnership work in more detail in order to enhance research and future policy development.

Phase 2 of the project carried out more detailed qualitative research with stakeholders and sex workers within the South Wales area where sex work was found to be most prevalent. Phase 2 was divided into two parts (A) and (B).

The aim of phase 2 (A) was to:

- Provide a detailed account of how local areas with significant sex work populations respond to sex work within a multi-agency capacity
- Ascertain the opinions of key stakeholders regarding how sex work is managed in those areas
- Analyse qualitative data to understand the different issues and approaches within the South Wales area
- Locate an area which could most benefit from collaborative work with the SWRW project

Phase 2 (B) carried out in-depth qualitative research with service providers and sex workers within the city of Swansea which was identified as having the potential to most benefit from collaborative work with the SWRW project.

The aim of phase 2 (B) was to:

- Work with local organisations to engage sex workers
- Carry out in-depth interviews with sex workers to explore the meaning and depth of experience
- Carry out research with the wider community to ascertain views and opinions and concerns (if any) regarding sex work activity in the area
- Provide an evidence base to assist local organisations to move forward with service development and the development of multi-agency work

### 1.4 Structure of the Report

The report is organised into the following sections:

#### Section 2: Methodology

This section provides an outline of the overall methodological framework of the project which combined two research phases.

#### Section 3: Findings

Section 3.1 focuses on Phase 1 of the study and provides the first empirical description of sex work on a national level in Wales.

Section 3.2 reports on Phase 2 (A) of the study and presents qualitative research findings from the South Wales area which was found to have the highest numbers of sex workers in Wales (Cardiff, Newport and Swansea).

Section 3.3 presents the findings from Phase 2 (B) of the study and highlights the work of the SWRW project within the city of Swansea. With the assistance of Cyrenians, members of the sex work community and wider community, research was undertaken to provide for a more detailed understanding of sex work in the community; the views, opinions and needs of sex workers; and to explore the potential for service development and enhanced multi-agency work.

#### Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

This section offers conclusions drawn from the SWRW project and makes some substantive recommendations for Wales.

# Sex Work Research Wales

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Action Research

The study adopted a multi methods methodological approach and was underpinned by an Action Research (AR) ethos. The project embraced the following definition of AR:

**“An orientation to knowledge creation that arises in a context of practise and requires researchers to work with practitioners. Unlike conventional social science, its purpose is not primarily or solely to understand social arrangements, but also to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders”**

(Bradbury-Huang, 2010:93).

It is important to note that within the study, ‘practitioners’ and ‘stakeholders’ included sex workers. Such a definition clearly exhibits a philosophy and ethos that methodologically addresses the power balance from research that is carried out ‘on’ participants to one that is inclusive, potentially empowering and conducts research ‘with’ those who are the subject of the study. Moreover, AR has been highlighted as a process that can generate new knowledge, inform policy and service provision and lead to social change through action (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). It was a priority of the project to facilitate and ensure that the voices of sex workers and the wider community in Wales were heard alongside those of stakeholder agencies/organisations.

In studies of sex work communities globally and in the UK, AR has on occasion utilised the skills, experience and interpretations of peer researchers to provide the insiders view of phenomena that can be misrepresented by ‘outsider’ researchers (van der Meulen, 2011).

Phase 2 of the study was carried out with peer researchers. In total 10 peer researchers were trained to carry out interviews with sex workers and administer questionnaires with residents and members of the business community. Consultations were also undertaken with service provider stakeholders in Swansea in relation to

the focus of the questions that were asked in this stage of the project.

### 2.2 Research Framework: Phase 1

The collection of data regarding sex work locations across Wales as well as knowledge of sex work markets (both on and off street) and levels of local service provision was achieved by the following research strategies:

#### 2.2.1 Community Safety Partnerships (CSP)

Using local authority websites for CSPs across Wales, Chairs / administrators were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire requesting their knowledge of:

- Street based and indoor sex work by gender and location, as well as estimations of numbers.
- Awareness of specialist support services for sex workers and other services they felt sex workers may access.
- Formal multi-agency sex worker partnerships / strategies or forums.
- Additional information / local knowledge on the approach to sex work in their area.

17 CSPs in Wales responded to the survey, the following CSP’s did not return any information: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Torfaen

#### 2.2.2 NHS and other service providers

In a similar way to CSPs, this phase of the project involved the administration of a questionnaire to NHS and other services and had three overarching aims:

- To capture locations of sex work activity and estimates of sex worker numbers
- To seek information about services in the locality towards engaging as many services with the research as possible

- To locate specialist sex worker services and to establish whether services linked into or identified multi-agency partnerships in the area

Given the range and structural complexities of NHS services in Wales a strategic decision was made to target those services thought to be the most likely to have sex workers as service users. Accordingly, the following three areas of service delivery were identified:

- Sexual Health Services
- Substance Misuse Services
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC)

In addition to direct contact with the services identified, an appeal to take part in the study was also made to NHS services and non NHS services through the All Wales Sexual Health Network.

In total 44 NHS Sexual Health services across Wales and 5 Sexual Assault Referral Centres were identified as potential participants for this phase of the study. In relation to substance misuse services, all services across Wales were contacted through a single point of contact from one health board who acted as a gatekeeper regarding the request to complete the questionnaire. However, despite the potential for a large return rate for NHS responses, only 12 services returned a questionnaire.

### 2.2.3 Non Statutory Service Providers

Data was also collected from a variety of service providers across Wales who may also have sex workers as service users. Services were identified that offered services in relation to homelessness, substance misuse issues, support for female offenders, domestic violence or sexual assault, as well as specific services for sex workers and services that although voluntary, provided a service to statutory bodies such as criminal justice agencies, in this case the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP). In addition to making direct contact with identified organisations, requests were made through forums such as the Violence Against Women Network and the Women in the Criminal Justice System Forum.

In total 138 (non NHS) services across Wales were identified as potential participants for this phase of the study. All services were asked to complete a questionnaire either by phone or through self completion return of the questionnaire. Services were asked to complete a questionnaire whether they identified sex workers accessing their services or not. The purpose of this was to build a picture of the service provision for delivery of services to sex workers as well as estimates of sex worker numbers. 37 services agreed to take part in the research. Out of the 37 responses, 25 services provided estimations of sex worker numbers accessing their service.

Returns across both NHS and other services totalled 49 and from that number 37 services identified sex workers in some capacity.

### 2.2.4 Sex Workers and Service Provision

With the exclusion of the responses from the SARC, we asked services who had identified sex workers as service users, to administer a questionnaire about service provision on behalf of the project. Where appropriate, services were given training in how to carry out the survey and informed of the importance of issues such as informed consent. This included one third sector organisation that worked directly with off street sex workers, two NHS sexual health services and one NHS substance misuse service. In total 45 sex workers completed the questionnaire.

### 2.2.5 Freedom of Information Requests

#### Police Forces

In order to assist with understanding levels of regulatory responses to sex work across Wales and to identify criminal prosecutions of offences associated with prostitution, Freedom of Information Act (2000) requests were made to the four police forces in Wales for the period 31st July 2009 and 1st August 2010.

The requests were made to ascertain levels of sex work activity on and off street that had been brought to the attention of the police and warranted police action.

Key issues covered by Freedom of Information requests included:

The numbers of women, men and transgender people had been cautioned / arrested / released without charge / charged for soliciting and loitering under the Street Offences Act 1959.

Information relating to police 'operations' for the offences of 'keeping, assisting and managing' a brothel under sections 33-36 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 between 1st July 2009 and 31st August 2010. Also, if police operations were conducted, data on the number of arrests, cautions, details of any charge.

Information regarding the use of Closure Orders under Section 21 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 between 1st April 2010 (when the orders came into force) and 31st August 2010. Also, if police operations were conducted, data on the number of arrests, cautions, details of any charges made and the number of convictions.

Information on prostitution-related offences under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 including details of the number of people arrested, cautioned, details of charges, number of convictions and details of court sentencing.

Information on any police operations in relation to the offence of 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain under Sections 52-53 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and 'paying for sexual services of a prostitute subject to force under Section 14 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 between 1st April 2010 (when the Act came into force) and 31st August 2010.

We asked the four forces that if they had not conducted any operations regarding controlling for gain but had arrested people for this offence to supply details.

We also requested data in relation to Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation and kerb crawling offences.

Answers relating to our requests for data on the issue of inciting prostitution for gain and paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subject to force are missing for South Wales Police. Answers relating to the issues of Human Trafficking and kerb crawling are missing from Dyfed Powys Police, Gwent

Police and South Wales Police due to our requests being deemed 'vexatious' by these three police forces in Wales. The team accept that the frequency of the requests for information could be deemed to be vexatious by the police authorities which were contacted by the team in Wales.

## The Courts

The research team submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Justice for data on the issuing of Engagement and Support Orders (brought in under Section 17 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009) against street sex workers in Welsh Courts from 1st April 2010 and 31st July 2011 (immediately after the Act came into force). Also a request was made for information on breaches of Section 17 engagement orders in Welsh Courts. Unfortunately, this information was not held centrally. The only option for the research team was to apply individually to every magistrate court in Wales.

Given that Freedom of Information responses from the four Police Forces in Wales indicated that there had been no police operations against street based sex workers during the same period and that across the whole of Wales only 16 female sex workers in South Wales had received cautions with apparently no further action taken (that is, South Wales Police did not hold any additional information on arrests, charges, prosecutions and / or convictions for the 16 females), it was deemed unnecessary to pursue this line of investigation.

### 2.2.6 The Prison Service

In relation to sex workers and prison, an unpublished report was made available to the research team by HMP Eastwood Park. A review of the document 'Reducing Reoffending Needs Analysis' assisted with understanding the experiences of sex working women in prison.

### 2.2.7 Welsh Wards

Part of the mapping research framework included the identification of sex work within 891 Welsh Wards. Informed consent was sought from all four Police forces. Gwent Police, North Wales Police and Dyfed Powys Police agreed to assist with the research. Consequently, local police officers or police support staff such as Police Community

Support Officers (PCSO's) who had responsibility for a geographical ward were contacted and completed a questionnaire either by a phone interview or via return from a centrally identified member of police staff who coordinated the administration and return of the questionnaire.

However, South Wales police administered the questionnaire 'internally using the experience of our Detective Inspectors in the Public Protection Departments'. Therefore, Police officers or members of staff with responsibility for Neighbourhood Management did not have direct contact with the research team. However, in order to triangulate the response of South Wales Police, researchers also conducted a search of the 'Our Bobby' website for the Local Authority areas of Swansea, Cardiff and Bridgend. These local authority areas were targeted as other data collection processes had indicated that sex work may be prevalent in these locations within the South Wales Police area.

Return rates were excellent at ward level from the three police forces in Wales that directly engaged with the research team: North Wales Police approximately 89 %; Dyfed Powys approximately 81%; Gwent Police approximately 77 %.

### 2.2.8 Three 'One Day Counts'

Accurate estimations of sex work are notoriously difficult to establish (Cusick, et al, 2009). Therefore as there is no scientifically established methodology for presenting measures of sex worker numbers, a strategy was developed based on the ground breaking 'snap shot' methodology of Stanko (2001). Accordingly, researchers identified sex workers through adverts for sexual services in newspapers and advertisers across Wales and through internet sources on the following three dates:

- 16th December 2010
- 17th February 2011
- 13th April 2011

The research strategy developed a framework of search terms which were used to identify adverts for sexual services both within the newspaper counts and for the internet mapping.

Given the extent of online advertising of

sexual services, a decision was made to use one internet site which is the largest advertiser of sexual services in the UK and also provides services by geographical breakdown. On each of the three days, the numbers of adverts for sexual services were counted on this one site and sister site.

With regard to newspaper advertising, a list of newspapers was taken from 'Benn's Media Directory' for 2010. Copies of all identified publications were then ordered on each of the dates in question. Records were made of the advertisements on each day.

Both processes were analysed for duplication independently and then merged together to provide an overall picture of the number of advertisements on each of the three dates.

Duplications across the three dates were then removed, providing the numbers of individual sex workers and establishments advertising services on the internet site and in newspapers in Wales.

## 2.3 Research Framework: Phase 2

### 2.3.1 Phase 2 (A)

SWRW aimed to compare and contrast approaches to sex work within the South Wales area (identified by Phase 1 as the area within which sex work was most prevalent). During this phase of the study semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. Adopting a case study approach allowed comparisons to be made in relation to the multi-agency responses to sex work in different geographical areas and also presented the opportunity to provide in depth knowledge of sex work in those localities.

16 stakeholder organisations took part in the research: Cardiff (4); Newport (6); Swansea (6).

### 2.3.2 Phase 2 (B)

The city of Swansea was identified as the area which would most benefit from SWRW partnership work. In the final stage of the project, questionnaires were carried out with businesses and members of the community in relation to the impact of sex work in Swansea. Community researchers administered the questionnaire, interviewed participants and carried out data analysis. 58

community participants took part in the research.

Surveys were also undertaken with sex workers in the case study area together with semi-structured qualitative interviews which were carried out by the research team and peer researchers. These interviews sought to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sex worker experiences in the case study area. 44 sex worker participants took part in this stage of the research.

## 2.4 Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers, or those with ‘privileged access’, were utilised in both phases of the study. Firstly, as administrators of the questionnaire with sex workers regarding service provision, and in the second phase with the administration of the second survey with sex workers. Gatekeepers also assisted with the design of the research instrument and the focus of the questions asked and facilitated semi-structured interviewing through the hosting of 10 ‘engagement events’.

## 2.5 Sampling

The sampling framework for the study was a hybrid of self selecting; opportunistic; snowballing and targeted. Such sampling frameworks are not without limitations but are also not unusual in studies relating to the study of sex work (Shaver, 2005).

## 2.6 Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using a data analysis software package. Basic descriptive statistics were produced. Qualitative interviews were coded thematically following analysis using qualitative analysis software.

## 2.7 Ethics

Overall ethical approval for the study was granted by the College of Health and Human Sciences, Swansea University. In addition to this, permission to conduct the study with staff and service users across all of the local Health Boards in Wales was obtained from all but one of the Research and Development authorities responsible for Health Boards (the Health Board that did not take part in the research did not refuse permission; it was simply that the time it took to process the application held up the progress of the project to an unacceptable level and regrettably the project had to make the

decision to exclude it from the research).

Overall ethical approval in relation to NHS data collection was granted by Dyfed Powys Research, Ethics Committee. As a requirement of this permission, all research staff undertook training in ‘Good Clinical Practice’. Moreover, the ethical dilemmas involved in researching sex work and the personal ethical obligations of those carrying out the research were made clear during training events delivered by Swansea University to project peer researchers.

All participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the aims of the project and the risks and benefits of taking part in the study. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent sheet once they had given due consideration to participation in the study. Anonymity was ensured for all participants.

One ethical issue that was discussed within the project was whether those sex workers who took part in the study should be paid for their participation especially when it was known that some were problematic drug users. A decision was made that remuneration to those sex workers who took part in Phase 1 of the study would be through the offer of a small toiletries/cosmetic package. During Phase 2 (B) of the study, sex workers were invited to attend engagement events where they were provided with refreshments, a toiletry pack, treatments such as manicure and tanning, as well as the opportunity to take part in activities such as cake decorating. All of which were made available with the aim of producing an inclusive, non-threatening environment that would facilitate discussion between the participants, engagement with service providers and the research team, and improve the self-esteem of those taking part.

# Sex Work Research Wales

# 3. Findings

## 3.1 Phase 1: Mapping Sex Work in Wales

### Research Question 1: In which geographical areas are sex workers located in Wales?

#### What did we do?

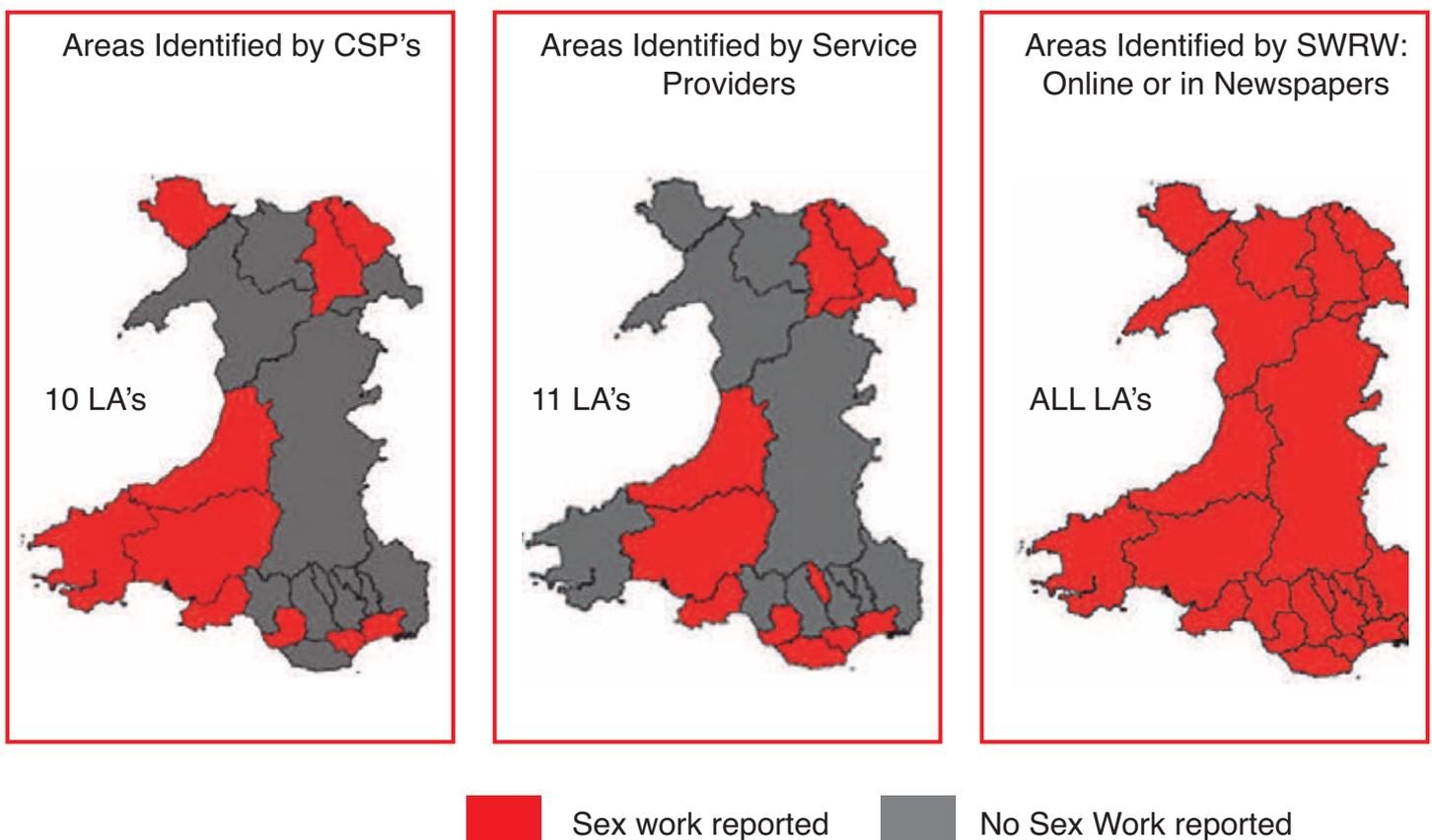
We geographically mapped Wales to identify areas where sex work takes place.

This was done through:

- Estimates from Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)
- Estimates from local services across Wales that may have contact with sex workers
- Identified actual numbers of sex workers advertising on the internet and in newspapers

#### Results

Sex work was located in all Local Authority (LA) areas of Wales



**Areas Identifying more than 10 street based sex workers**



Carmarthenshire (estimated range 10-30)

Cardiff (estimated at 100)

Newport (estimated at 50)

Swansea (estimated at 40)

**Areas Identifying 10 or more brothels**

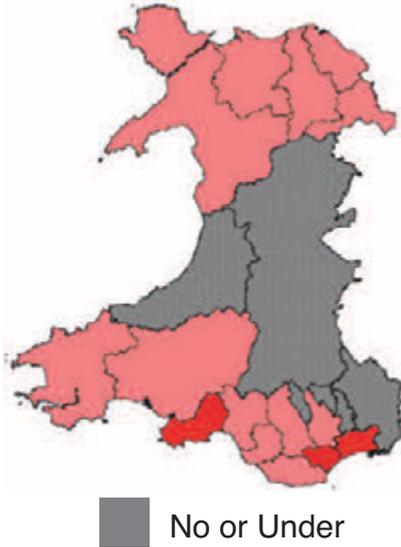


Cardiff (estimated at 10)

Newport (estimated range 10 to 20)

Swansea (estimated range 10 to 11)

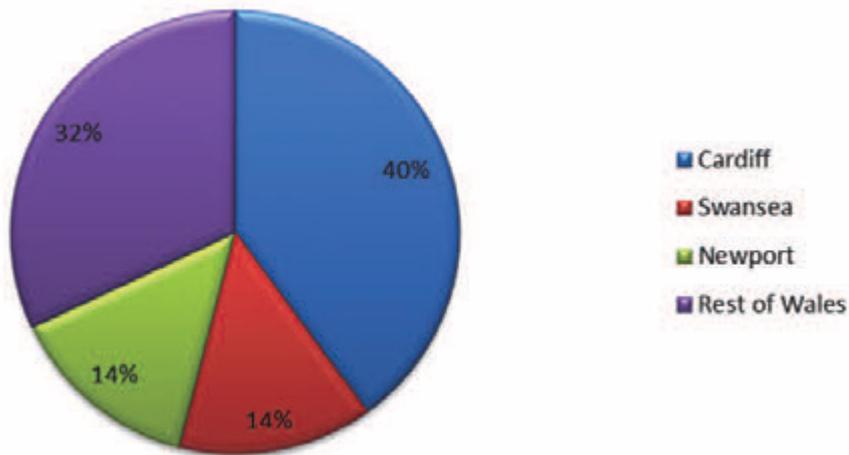
Areas identifying more than 10 independent sex workers advertising through internet/newspapers. The darker the shade of red the higher the sex work population.



The figures below for each LA area represents the average number of advertisements over the three 'one day counts'

- Anglesey (22 internet)
- Bridgend (22 internet / 1.3 newspapers)
- Caerphilly (20.3 internet / 0.6 newspapers)
- Cardiff (266 internet / 32.3 newspapers)
- Carmarthen (20.3 internet / 5.3 newspapers)
- Conway (16 internet / 3.3 newspapers)
- Denbighshire (12 internet / 7.0 newspapers)
- Flintshire (9 internet / 15 newspapers)
- Gwynedd (14.3 internet)
- Neath Port Talbot (16.7 internet / 8.3 newspapers)
- Newport (82 internet / 14.6 newspapers)
- Pembrokeshire (17 internet / 1.0 newspapers)
- Rhondda Cynon Taff (12 internet / 1.3 newspapers)
- Swansea (85.3 internet / 10.2 newspapers)
- Vale of Glamorgan (16.3 internet / 0.3 newspapers)
- Wrexham (18.3 internet / 14.6 newspapers)

**Regional Analysis of internet enabled sex work:**

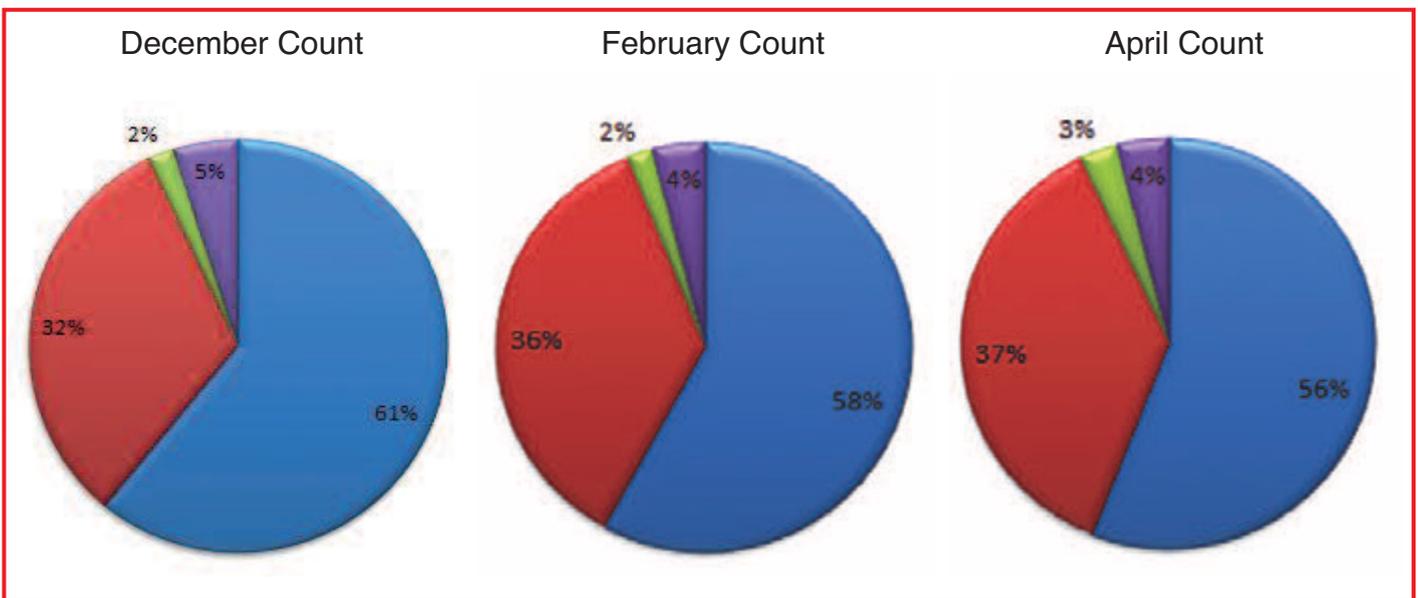


**Areas of Wales where sex work (on and off street) is most concentrated:**

**Cardiff, Newport and Swansea**

**Key findings:**

- CSPs could not provide any estimates for the number of off street workers in their local area.
- CSPs could not provide any estimates of transvestite or transsexual sex Workers. Only 1 CSP identified 1 male sex worker. However, gender analysis of internet enabled sex workers revealed the following:
- The majority of service providers had little awareness of off street activity in their areas.
- Cardiff, Newport and Swansea were identified the areas in Wales with the most concentrated sex work activity.



■ Female      ■ Transgender  
■ Male      ■ Couples

**Key Findings: Numbers of sex workers in Wales**

- **1195** sex workers were identified online
- **209** sex workers were identified advertising in newspapers
- **155** street based workers were estimated across Wales by CSPs however this figure was estimated to be up to 263 by service providers
- **57** sex work establishments were identified advertising online/in newspapers and through CSP responses; however this figure was estimated to be up to 67 by service providers.

Taking the lowest estimate (57) and multiplying this by the mean number of 16 which represents sex workers working in off street establishments (the mean figure is based on estimates of Outreach workers in the cities of Cardiff, Newport

and Swansea see Phase 2 (B) of this report), we suggest that there are at least 912 off street sex workers working in brothels/massage parlours in Wales.

**SWRW** estimates that there are at least **2471** sex workers in Wales. However, given the limitations of the research this figure is likely to be substantially higher. For example SWRW carried out three one day counts on only two sister websites in Wales; escort agencies and sex workers thought to be working independently are also known to operate through social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter and individuals advertise sexual services on their own websites.

## Research Question 2: Are sex workers the target of operational policing in Wales?

### *What did we do?*

Freedom of Information requests were made to the four police forces in Wales for the period 31st July 2009 and 1st August 2010.

The requests were made to ascertain levels of sex work activity on and off street that had been brought to the attention of the police and warranted police action.

### **Results:**

#### **Dyfed Powys Police**

The force did not hold any information on prostitution-related offences or police operations during the specified period.

The force refused to answer requests for information regarding offences for Human Trafficking and kerb crawling on the grounds that the requests were vexatious.

#### **Gwent Police**

The force had not issued any cautions or made any arrests or released any individual without charge for soliciting or loitering offences (Street Offences Act 1959).

The force had not carried out any police operations in relation to 'brothel keeping' (Sexual Offences Act 1956), 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' (Sexual Offences Act 2003), or 'paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subject to force' (Policing and Crime Act 2009).

The force had not used brothel closure orders (Policing and Crime Act 2009).

Gwent police had made one arrest for the offence of 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' but this related to an historic offence carried out between 2003 and 2007.

The force refused to answer requests for information regarding offences for Human Trafficking and kerb crawling on the grounds that the requests were vexatious.

#### **North Wales Police**

The force had not issued any cautions or made any arrests or released any individual without charge for soliciting or loitering offences (Street Offences Act 1959).

The force had not carried out any police

operations in relation to 'brothel keeping' (Sexual Offences Act 1956), 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' (Sexual Offences Act 2003), or 'paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subject to force' (Policing and Crime Act 2009).

The force had not used brothel closure orders (Policing and Crime Act 2009).

The force had carried out one operation in relation to the offence of 'keeping, assisting and managing a brothel' but it did not hold any additional information.

The force had made one arrest for the offence of 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' but it did not hold any additional information.

The force did not hold any information for offences relating to Human Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation or kerb crawling.

#### **South Wales Police**

Cautions had been issued for offences of 'soliciting' and 'loitering' (Street Offences Act 1959) to 16 females during the specified period but no arrests were made and thus there were no charges or convictions.

The force had not carried out any operations in relation to 'keeping a brothel' or 'keeping, assisting or managing a brothel' (Sexual Offences Act 1959). It had not used closure orders and no arrests had been made under the Policing and Crime Act 2009.

Unfortunately the force declined to answer requests for data with regard to the offences of 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain', 'paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subject to force', Human Trafficking and kerb crawling, or provide details on any related operations on the grounds that the requests for information were vexatious.

### *Key findings:*

- Sex workers are rarely the subject of targeted police operations in Wales.
- Only 16 cautions were issued against females for soliciting and loitering in the whole of Wales (the cautions being issued in the South Wales Police area).
- Only 2 arrests were made for prostitution-related offences in the whole of Wales: the first for the offence of 'keeping, assisting and managing a brothel' (issued by North Wales Police) and the second for the offence of 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' (issued by Gwent Police), however, the latter related to an historic offence which was committed between 2003 - 2007.

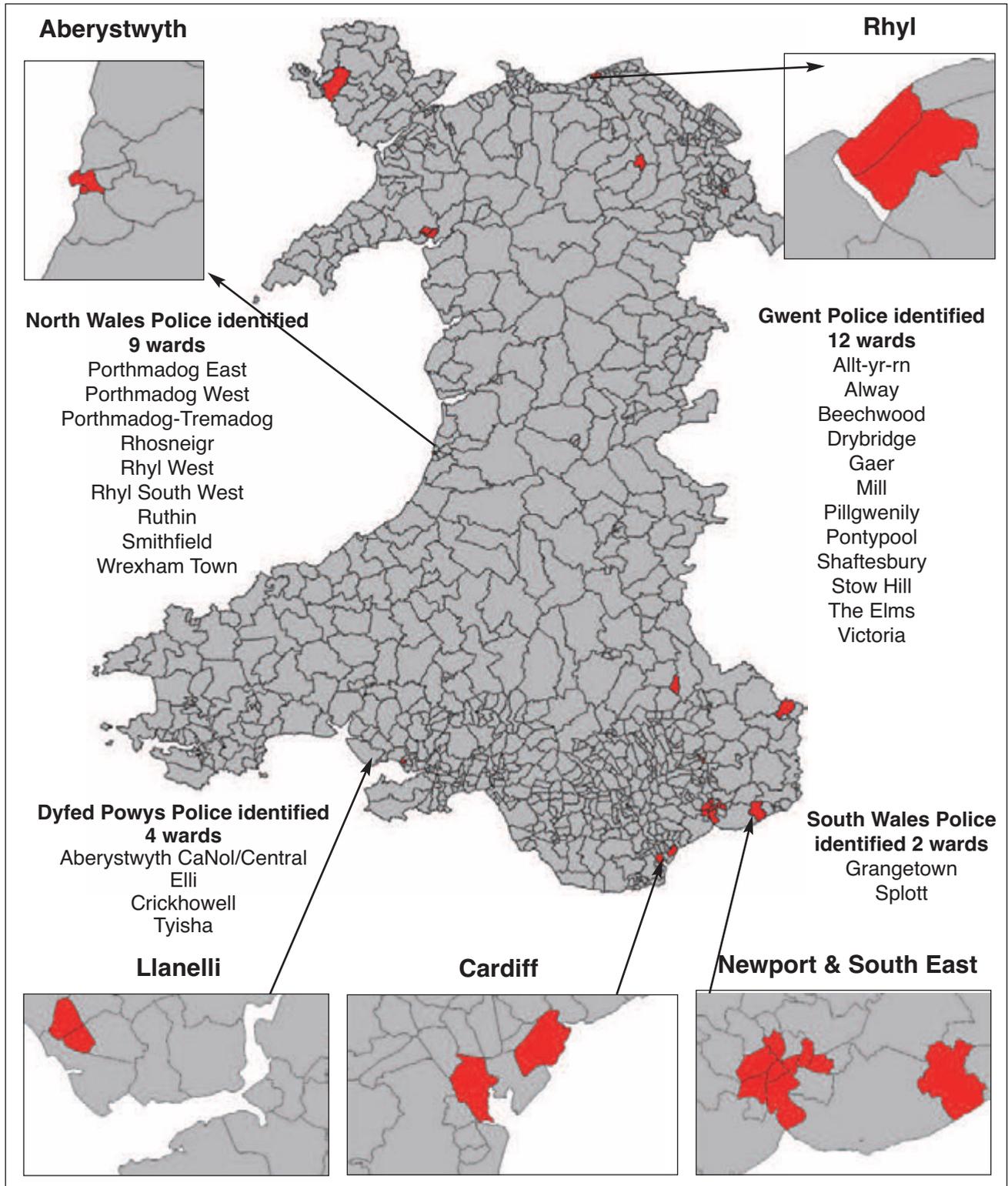
### Research Question 3: In which areas of Wales is sex work a community issue?

#### What did we do?

SWRW contacted the four police forces in Wales seeking permission to collate local data through local police representatives in 891 Wards.

#### Results:

Sex work was identified as taking place or having recently taken place in 27 Welsh wards.



Although responses from local police representatives confirmed that sex work had or was taking place in the wards listed above, several local representatives took the time to explain the context of sex work activity.

For example:

**Rhyl West and Rhyl South West (North Wales)** identified only one brothel that did not attract anti-social behaviour or crime.

**Ruthin (North Wales)** identified one alleged sex worker. Sex work was not visible in the area.

**Porthmadog East, Porthmadog West and Porthmadog Tremadog (North Wales)** identified one sex worker advertising services in the local newspaper.

**Rhosneigr (North Wales)** the police had been alerted anonymously to sex work activities advertised in a local paper.

**Aberystwyth Canol/Central (Dyfed Powys)** identified an isolated and unsubstantiated report of sex work raised by a local business.

**Crickhowell (Dyfed Powys)** identified very low level sex work in the area where females had attended a Public House for business but no direct action had been taken.

**Elli and Tyisha (Dyfed Powys)** identified a couple of women who offered sex for sale in the town centre – this was not on the street it was arranged privately.

**Mill and The Elms (Newport, Gwent)** sex workers had attended Magor Services at night to solicit lorry drivers that park up overnight in the surrounding lay-bys but this had been dealt with by the police.

**Pontypool (Gwent):** sex work had been confined to a small number of females but it was no longer an issue in the area.

Responses confirmed that sex work was only a community concern in **6** Welsh wards:

**Grangetown and Splott (Cardiff):** On average three residents raised their concerns about sex work at each Partners and Community Together (PACT) meetings held in Splott and Grangetown between January and May [2011]. When members of the community raise their concerns, sex work is treated as a PACT priority.

Prostitution is highlighted as a PACT 'project' in both Grangetown and Splott. It appears that street sex work is an issue which impacts negatively on the community to some degree; the local policing response for Grangetown and Splott is a mixture of enforcement strategies within a wider strategic multi-agency partnership approach.

**Pillgwenlly (Newport):** Approximately three residents had raised their concerns about sex work. The issue had been designated a PACT priority. Sex work is dealt with through a multi-agency partnership (the neighbourhood team works with a women's refuge worker and drug referral officers).

**Victoria (Newport):** Approximately four to five residents had reported that they had seen street prostitutes. The police proactively responded by carrying out targeted foot patrols in the areas of the sightings and the problem subsided, although it does reoccur very occasionally. Local officer responses indicated that multi-agency work did take place in the area but no further information was provided.

**Alway (Newport):** Complaints had been received from two residents about a brothel which caused 'significant upset' being located in an area where there were elderly residents. Residents had complained to local councillors and the local MP and had received priority status. The police conducted visits to the brothel to monitor the occupants. The brothel eventually relocated due to the attention/pressure that was exerted by Gwent Police and local councillors who acted on the constant complaints of residents. Local police respondents were aware of multi-agency work in the area but provided no further information.

**Beechwood (Newport):** sex work had been raised as an issue by two or three residents at a local police surgery. Concerns focused on Anti-Social Behaviour in relation to a brothel and its situation in a quiet residential street. The police worked with the brothel to ensure that clients were mindful of residents in the area. The police gathered intelligence through the community cohesion team, logged incidents of concern, carried out ongoing monitoring and also investigated who owned the property. The issue was at the time ongoing. Respondents also pointed out that the community cohesion team linked with partner agencies to monitor and assist women working in the houses.

### **Key findings:**

- Street sex work is not identified as a community issue in the Dyfed Powys Police area.
- There are low levels of sex work identified in North Wales but this is not identified as a community issue.
- Evidence suggests that sex work is an issue for the community in only six Welsh wards – four in Newport and two in Cardiff. Evidence also suggests that sex work is only a concern for a minority of residents within these wards.

## Research Question 4: Which areas of Wales respond to sex work through a multi-agency partnership approach?

### *What did we do?*

We asked the 22 Community Safety Partnerships in Wales to provide us with information about sex work specialist support services and sex work focused multi-agency/partnership work taking place in their local authority areas.

We also asked service providers across Wales for information on sex work focused service provision and information on multi-agency work in their area.

### **Results:**

#### *CSP: Identification of sex work focused specialist services*

Only 2 CSPs identified specialist services for sex workers in their area

<b>Cardiff</b>
Safer Wales Street Life
Cardiff Sex Work Operational Team
<b>Newport</b>
Women in Need

#### *CSP: Identification of sex work focused multi-agency partnership work*

Only 2 CSPs identified multi-agency responses/partnership work to sex workers in their area

**Cardiff:** Strong multi-agency partnership work was identified in Cardiff. The city has a Cardiff Sex Worker Forum and Cardiff Sex Worker Operational Team providing pathways for women into Sexual Health Clinic (ISH). Through the work of the Cardiff Forum, links are in place to support services including: probation, Drug Intervention Project, primary care, accident and emergency, mental health, adult services and housing. EP, needle exchange, hostel, HUB, primary care, A & E, mental health, adult services, hostels and housing. Needle exchange is also available.

**Newport:** A 'prostitution multi-agency group' was identified (more detailed information was not provided).

#### *Service Providers: identification of specialist sex worker services*

**Cardiff:** 12 services completed the questionnaire. All services confirmed that specialist sex worker services existed in Cardiff and notably that service provision was coordinated through the work of the Cardiff Sex Work Forum.

**Newport:** 5 services completed the questionnaire. Only three services were aware of specialist services for sex workers.

**Wrexham:** 5 services completed the questionnaire. One North Wales NHS, harm reduction, substance misuse service self-identified as a specialist sex worker service.

#### *Service Providers: Identification of sex worker focused multi-agency partnerships*

**Cardiff:** 11 services confirmed that sex work focused multi-agency partnership work took place in the city. All of the services that responded to the questionnaire were members of the Cardiff Sex Work Forum.

**Newport:** None of the service providers indicated that they linked into any formal multi-agency partnerships or indicated an awareness of multi-agency work.

**Swansea:** 3 services confirmed that informal multi-agency work took place. Networks were in their infancy but services hoped to develop a formal strategic multi-agency response to sex work in the city.

**Wrexham:** The GUM clinic linked in to multi-agency partnership work in the North of England. The North Wales NHS substance misuse harm reduction service also 'linked in' to other services in the area. However, sex work focused multi-agency partnership work did not take place in the area.

## **Key findings**

- Only two areas Cardiff and Newport had developed a multi-agency response to sex work.
- Only three areas Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham identified specialist sex worker services.
- Services in Cardiff and Newport were very committed to engaging with the project research.
- Services in Cardiff were aware of one another and were members of the Cardiff Sex Work Forum.
- The five services in Newport indicated that they were not aware of multi-agency work taking place in the City, despite it being identified by the local Community Safety Partnership. It appears that there is less awareness on the ground of multi-agency work in Newport and this perhaps indicates that multi-agency work is perhaps not as developed as it is in Cardiff.
- Informal multi-agency work takes place in Swansea.
- Some services in Wrexham link in to other services but there is no formal multi-agency work taking place within Wrexham.

## Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of sex workers on service provision and is there a need for multi-agency work?

### What did we do?

Service providers acted as gatekeepers and carried out questionnaires with their sex worker service users. 45 sex workers in Wales provided SWRW with their views on service provision.

### Results:

- All of the respondents were female
- The majority of participants self identified as 'working girl' (29) and 'sex worker' (14)
- 18 respondents had been selling sex for over 5yrs; 19 between 1 and 5 yrs; 8 less than 1yr
- The majority of respondents worked in Cardiff (13) and Newport (23) areas. Movement across geographical locations was minimal with sex workers opting to work in a fixed location
- 38 participants worked off street with 7 working on street

Services used in the last 12 months	Number of sex workers reporting
GP	33
Sexual Health	29
Outreach	19
Drug/Alcohol	19
Police	18
A & E	14
Mental Health	8
Social Services	6
Citizens Advice	7

Barriers to accessing services	Number of sex workers reporting
Do not wish to disclose	19
Lack of confidence	13
Fear of authorities	12
Lack of Money	9
Fear won't be believed	8
Language Barriers	5
Lack of awareness about services	5
Fear of violence	3
Location of service	1

### Participants suggested that services could be improved by:

Providing non-judgemental services (less than half of the participants (21) felt able to disclose their occupations)

Providing access to benefits and housing

Providing Outreach services that delivered consistent support

Extended outreach and clinic services (such as extended opening hours)

Providing an increased supply of condoms

Providing sexual health vaccinations and advice

### Key findings:

- 36 out of 45 respondents came from participants working in areas where multi-agency work takes place (Newport and Cardiff).
- 18 had used police services and 14 A and E, however less than half of participants felt able to disclose their occupations.
- Less than half of the respondents were using Outreach services and drug and alcohol services. The main barriers to accessing services were highlighted as not wishing to disclose sex work as an occupation; the lack of confidence to disclose and fear of authorities.
- Perceptions on service provision improvements including the need to provide non judgemental services clearly link to sex workers feeling unable to disclose their occupations.
- While sex workers were able to identify ways in which service provision could be improved (such as flexible opening hours), access to benefits and housing were highlighted as key concerns.
- The findings indicated a need for multi-agency work to meet the wide ranging needs of sex workers including access to benefits and housing as well as advice, support, and access to sexual health care, Outreach and drug and alcohol services.
- The findings also indicated that any multi-agency approach should aim to tackle issues of stigma and provide non judgemental services as well as working to build up trustful relationships between sex workers and authorities to facilitate the disclosure of sex work as an occupation

## Phase 1 Summary

### Locating sex workers in Wales

- Sex work is identified in all 22 local authority areas of Wales. However sex work is most concentrated in the areas of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea although Wrexham and Carmarthenshire also identified significant sex work populations.
- There is little acknowledgement about off street work in Wales. Off street sex work to a significant extent is invisible to law enforcement agencies, Community Safety Partnerships and service providers in Wales. Male and transgender sex workers are least visible in Wales; there is negligible acknowledgement of male sex work and no acknowledgement of transgender sex work.
- There is a significant off street internet/newspaper enabled market that is unacknowledged in Wales.
- SWRW suggests that there are at least **2471** sex workers in Wales. This figure was calculated by combining figures for sex workers who were identified by the research team with estimates from our project respondents. The actual number of sex workers in Wales is likely to be substantially higher.

### Regulation of sex work in Wales

- Responses to Freedom of Information requests suggests that sex work is not a priority for law enforcement agencies across Wales.

### Sex work as a community concern

- Sex work has only been raised as a cause of community concern in six Welsh wards. Where sex work is identified as a cause of community concern, partnership work is in place and the police act proactively.

### Specialist sex worker services and multi-agency partnership work

- Cardiff and Newport each have a specialist sex worker service. In Cardiff services are very aware of multi-agency work taking place in the city and participate in multi-agency partnership work. While multi-agency partnership work does take place in Newport, there was less awareness of this

work amongst services. Services in Swansea indicated that they were in the early stages of developing a specific service for sex workers as well as the development of a multi-agency response.

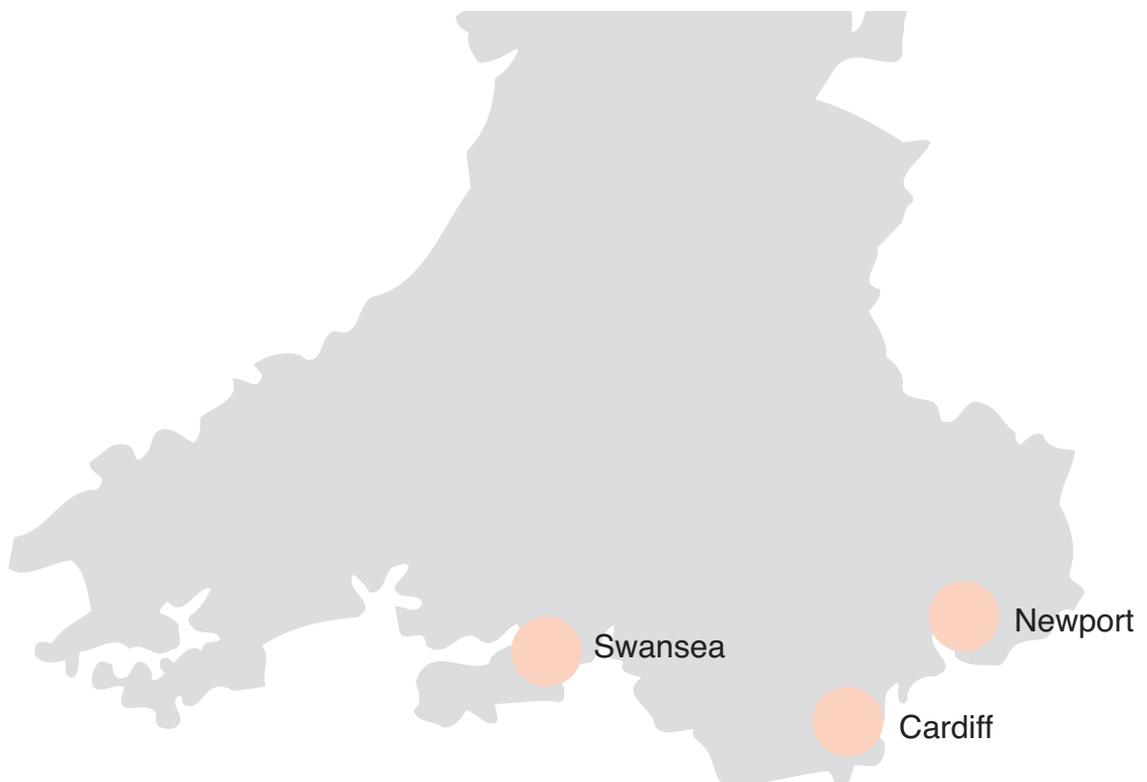
### Service user responses and the need for multi-agency partnership work

- Sex worker responses indicated the need for a multi-agency approach to address wide ranging needs.
- There is a need to provide non-judgemental service provision within a multi-agency framework.

### 3.2 Phase 2 (A)

Cardiff, Newport and Swansea – multi-agency practice, innovations and limitations.

Phase 1 of the project identified that sex work was most concentrated in the South Wales area and specifically within the neighbouring cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea – all of which are situated along the M4 corridor. Both Cardiff and Newport were found to adopt a multi-agency approach to sex work, with Swansea services expressing a commitment to the development of a multi-agency framework.



## Research Question 6: By comparing and contrasting geographical areas with significant sex worker populations, can good work on the ground be identified and shared?

In Phase 2 (A) of the project data was collated from Interviews with key stakeholder agencies / organisations in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. The project aimed to identify practical outcomes of multi-agency work with the aim of sharing information that could potentially lead to enhanced policy and practice.

### *What did we do?*

We asked services to share with us their understandings of sex work focused partnership work in their area as well as their views and opinions regarding the benefits and limitations regarding the delivery of multi-agency work.

### *Results:*

#### **3.2.1 Cardiff**

##### **Multi-agency development**

Multi-agency work in Cardiff is driven by the Cardiff Sex Worker Forum (CSWF) which represents several key stakeholder agencies in the city. Forum partners include the police, probation, Cardiff Council, Cardiff and Vale Health Board, DIP, Safer Wales StreetLife and other voluntary agencies.

The Forum aims to deliver a coordinated response to the needs of sex workers and the wider community in Cardiff. Various work streams of the CSWF are located within the 'What Matters' Integrated Partnership a 10 year strategy for Cardiff which was developed in 2010 (Cardiff Partnership, 2010).

A 'strategic management group' (SMT) has been developed to oversee the work of the Forum and a 'sex worker operational team' (SWOT) meets to address the needs of sex workers and adopts a case management approach. The strategic and operational support offered by CSWF has been commended by central and local government (Home Office, 2011, Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, 2012).

## **Responding to street sex work**

At the time of the research the vast majority of the work of the Forum had focused on street based sex work.

A key aim of the Forum, which was reiterated by all stakeholder participants, was the need to uphold and enforce the law and respond to community need and the vulnerabilities of street-based workers. This is interpreted by multi-agency partners in Cardiff ensuring justice for ALL the community.

While some members of the Forum such as the police have a statutory obligation to uphold the law and protect the community, community protection was interpreted broadly by Forum members to include a public health duty to protect sex workers and to keep sex workers safe.

## **Keeping street sex workers out of the criminal justice system: The Diversionary Pathway**

South Wales police and Forum partners perceive that street-based sex workers are victims rather than offenders (in accordance with guidance from ACPO and the Home Office). The police in Cardiff are committed to invoking Section 17 engagement and support orders brought in under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 which brings sex workers into the reach of support services to identify routes in to sex work and routes out of sex work and which offers an alternative to fines for soliciting and loitering. However, implementing Section 17 takes place within a multi-agency partnership context. The Forum as a whole is committed to keeping sex workers out of the criminal justice system wherever possible and the partners have developed a diversionary pathway where sex workers receive cautions with the provision that they have to engage with support services, thus a Section 17 order is perceived to be a last resort. None of the participants spoke directly about 'exiting' from sex work, the aim was to respond to the complex needs of sex workers, ensuring safety and improving wellbeing – whether sex workers remained in sex work or chose to exit.

## **Keeping street sex workers safe**

All the participants perceived that street-based sex workers were some of the most vulnerable people in society.

“

***...I just really worry about them from an adult safeguarding issue, you know that they (a lot of them) just seem to be in really poor physical health...some of them have got mental health problems, it's a whole substance misuse issue, and I think we see them...as some of the most vulnerable members of our society because they have fallen through so many other nets before they've ended up in that situation.***”

## Physical safety

It was clear that keeping street workers safe from violence was a key aim of the Forum. The partnership had put in place the 'Ugly Mugs' system developed by the United Kingdom of Sex Work Projects which is a mechanism for reporting violence against sex workers with the aim of sharing information, alerting sex workers to incidents of violence, mobile and dangerous and dangerous offenders who attack sex workers and other members of the community. The scheme is coordinated and delivered locally in Cardiff by the Outreach service Safer Wales 'StreetLife'. Key stakeholders within the Forum had identified a designated officer to report incidents of violence to StreetLife and to liaise with the Outreach organisation on issues of violence.

## Sexual health safety

Local sexual health provision is also identified as an essential service to keep sex workers safe. A local sexual health service is a key partner in the forum and multi-agency process. The Sexual Health Clinic in Cardiff has responded to the specific needs of street-based workers offering flexible clinic hours (within the restraints of the service) and works with other partners to engage with street-based workers to improve sexual health and wellbeing. For example, the clinic works with a homeless nurse to bring sex workers into the clinic on a monthly basis. It aims to provide a one stop shop for contraception and

sexual health screening, Hepatitis B vaccinations and any other issues that arise. Lunch is

provided for sex workers who also receive a hygiene pack.

## Crisis intervention: Sex worker Operational Team (SWOT)

The SWOT is designed on the format of a multi-agency risk assessment conference. SWOT was designed and implemented by the Forum as a mechanism to ensure that sex workers who were experiencing any form of crisis received protection within a formal structure. SWOT facilitates information sharing under the umbrella of public protection and enables services to pin point the most appropriate intervention and to fast track sex workers into services.

## Responding to off street sex work

Until 2013 the focus of the Forum was firmly fixed on street-based work, however expanding to the off street market was part of the strategic development work of the forum. In 2013 members of the Forum began an Outreach service to off street sex work establishments in Cardiff.

## Building up trustful relationships

The aim of Outreach work was to start up a service initially in the parlours but to also encourage off street workers to attend the clinic (to provide a holistic service that could only be facilitated within a clinic environment). Visiting off street establishments had built up relationships of trust and this in turn had several benefits: women were attending the clinic; managers of establishments were in contact with Forum members and bringing women into the clinic; introductions were being made on behalf of the sexual health Outreach team to managers of other off street establishments in Cardiff.

“***We thought they weren't coming to us because they didn't want to come to us but as it turned out its the exact opposite, once we engaged with them...its quite clear they are happy to come to us.***”

## Understanding the realities of off street work

Working in off street parlours had also altered the sexual health Outreach team's preconceived ideas, for example: that non British women working in parlours had been trafficked or forced into sex work; that off street workers were not using long term contraception; that off street sex workers were very young and sexually exploited.

**“ We have learnt an awful lot from going into the two parlours that we've gone into already...most of the girls we have seen don't do oral let alone anal...our perceptions were so wrong...they are strict about condom use...the women we see are all over 20. ”**

## Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

There was a consensus that Human Trafficking took place not in off street established parlours but in flats and houses. One participant explained

**“ there is an element of the traffickers not being able to control them in parlours...the parlours don't want trafficked girls there. ”**

However, the sexual health Outreach team at the time of interviewing had only entered two parlours in Cardiff and they were keen to enter others in the area. At the time of the research access to parlours was being achieved through Outreach sexual health service work however it was recognised that accessing some parlours was likely to require statutory authority to enter. The forum chair anticipated that a system could be set up whereby a police representative attended off street parlours with a familiar face from the sexual health outreach team to ask parlours to join such a scheme voluntarily or be aware that such a scheme is taking place.

At the time of interviewing, the Forum was also considering adopting a traffic light system to

regulate off street sex work. It was noted that the forum could benefit from a visit to Newport where it understood such a system was in operation already,

## Adopting an evidence-based approach

Partners have a voice within the Forum and decisions are based on evidence. Over a number of years the Forum had supported the commissioning of several pieces of research to identify the vulnerabilities of sex workers and the impact of sex work on the communities within which sex work takes place. Most recently for example, the Forum had come to a decision not to implement a kerb crawler re-education programme after recognising the lack of rigorous evidence to support the implementation of such a scheme. As one representative explained 'the real issue here is they're kerb crawling in residential areas...not that they're kerb crawlers'. Thus given that the negative impact on communities had been dramatically reduced this also meant that the Forum could direct limited resources where they were most needed.

## Reaching out to the community

Engaging with the community is a key aim of the CSWF. The Forum had put on events to engage with the community on the issue of sex work, in community centres in the localities of Splott and Grangetown (the two wards where sex work is identified as a community issue) and at Partners and Communities Together meetings. The aim being to discuss issues affecting the community as well as to share findings from research into community perceptions about sex work in the area that had been carried out on behalf of the Forum.

### Examples of key innovations:

- The development of a formalised response to sex worker needs and the impact on the community.
- The diversionary pathway which was implemented in the belief that the support should be provided wherever possible outside of the criminal justice system.
- The development and implementation of SWOT to identify as quickly as possible key interventions for high risk sex workers.
- The implementation of Ugly Mugs as a mechanism to keep sex workers safe.
- The adoption of a broad perception of 'safety' which includes sexual health service provision, health and wellbeing.
- Expanding Outreach into parlours: resulting in managers and sex workers feeling able visit the sexual health clinic and disclose their occupations to sexual health services.

### Key limitations to multi-agency work:

- The need to develop a more comprehensive response to the off street sex market.
- Participants had little awareness about the off street markets – it was pointed out that there was a need to develop a more comprehensive response to the off street market but that evidence was needed to facilitate this work, particularly with regard to the extent of the markets. Participants were keen to identify risks to sex workers whether or not the work is legal or illegal.
- Cardiff Police had been tasked with producing a report on known and hidden markets in the city. A representative of the Forum explained that the findings would help the partnership assess better the risk to all sex workers across the city.
- There was negligible awareness of male and transgender sex work.
- Limited capacity within services to respond to wider sex work markets.

**“...there has been no strategic work stream dedicated to this, all this work has happened under the radar. There has been no capacity in anybody's day jobs except for Safer Wales StreetLife because that is their core function to support this work. So for everybody else, part of their work is to do with street work but not exclusively...had I had a role that allowed me to do this work the agenda would be further along than it is now.”**

**(Forum Representative)**

- Limited sharing of good practice across Wales.
- Lack of training on sex work and responses to sex work within organisational structures.
- Some participants spoke of the need for services to undergo training internally to address judgemental attitudes about sex work.
- Low levels of community engagement at Forum events despite the Forum advertising the events and employing a variety of mechanisms such as leaflet dropping.

### 3.2.2 Newport:

#### Multi-agency development

There is a multi-agency 'prostitution group' that is chaired by the police but this does not meet regularly. The group represents a reactive forum where agencies come together to address a particular issue that requires attention. At the time of the research the police were drafting a 'prostitution' policy.

There is a keen willingness amongst services to engage in multi-agency work – evidenced not only in testimonies of participants but also by their representation on various multi-agency forums such as the domestic abuse multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).

However, at the time of the research partnership work most often is isolated to a relationship between two different agencies. Services in Newport 'link in' to the work of other services. However this work lies outside of any formal partnership agreement. A key aim of all partnership work is to support sex workers; participants recognise that reducing the numbers of workers is a desirable goal but not the 'end goal'. The main objective of agencies was to engage with sex workers and build up trustful relationships to keep sex workers safe and to enable support to be delivered.

#### Responding to street sex work

Street sex work is contained to a small area near the docks. The majority of street workers are well known to the police, half of workers are static and the other half enter in and out of sex working.

#### Regulatory responses

The police had made attempts to build up relationships with street based workers and aimed to engage with them in a less punitive way: 'We've tried to build up a policy of treating prostitutes as victims and give support and not to encourage criminalisation of street prostitutes...' However, anti-social behaviour was not tolerated and several anti-social behaviour orders had been invoked against street workers and to their clients.

#### Keeping street sex workers safe

It is a priority of stakeholder agencies in Newport to keep sex workers safe. In particular the police work with Women in Need (WIN) to raise awareness about violence and work together proactively to improve confidence amongst sex workers to report violence.

#### Physical safety

Newport has implemented their own approach to an 'Ugly Mugs' scheme. WIN operate the scheme and alert sex workers to important safety information and work closely with the police to collate evidence and carry out follow up with sex workers.

Partner agencies make referrals to WIN which acts as a conduit for sex workers to access support from agencies. Through the work of WIN referrals can be made to MARAC, the child sexual exploitation service SERAF and the sexual assault referral centre (SARC).

#### Crisis intervention

WIN works with a variety of other agencies such as substance misuse, the SARC, Women's Aid and the genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic and are, on occasion, able to fast track sex workers where good relationships exist with partner agencies.

#### Sexual health safety

While participants explained that there were good working relationships amongst agencies in Newport that came into contact with street workers, and while agencies did make referrals to the local GUM clinic, a representative from the GUM clinic explained that few street-based workers were known to the clinic. The participant believed that in part this was due to street sex worker's lives being much more chaotic and thus them finding it difficult to attend. It was also explained that some Outreach staff had gone out to the street to do testing but this is not something street based workers took up. DIP also explained that the service used to give out condoms and lube to street workers '*but people just didn't want to take them*'.

However, street based Outreach only took place once or twice a week. Generally participants emphasised the need for more Outreach workers to work with street based sex workers to build up relationships and encourage them to the clinic.

#### Responding to off street sex work

Participants explained that there are no shop front or sauna style sex working premises in Newport; instead sex work was conducted in private houses in residential areas. Premises tended to be open from 11 am until 11 pm. Further, the establishments were not static – it was explained that some sex workers rent premises in Newport and travel in to the city to

carry out sex work and return at night to their rural communities.

### Building up trustful relationships

The approach to off street sex work is a visitation procedure. Where intelligence comes to light or there is a suggestion of a new brothel opening up then the police visit that establishment to engage with the people there – visits include a police officer and an Outreach worker from Women in Need (WIN). Six officers are designated with the visitation role and this allows officers and WIN to build up rapport – the officers are then able to feed back data on numbers and individuals working in each property.

The police make it very clear that they cannot and do not condone sex working but as part of the force's pragmatic approach to sex work the aim is to build up a trustful relationship.

Where anti-social behaviour is raised in the prostitution group meetings, WIN liaises with Outreach workers to speak to off street workers to resolve the issue.

Trustful relationships had led to an increase in sex workers reporting violence. A police representative explained that sex workers also feel able to pass on their concerns about clients if they feel that something is wrong. Off street workers had also formed their own safety network and the police often tapped into this network which provided information and which also acted to assist the police by easing their entry into an establishment.

### Understanding the realities of the off street market

The police in Newport adopt a pragmatic approach to sex work in the City. Where off street establishments operate but do so quietly and discreetly then the police will visit but take no formal action against the establishment. For example, the police representative explained that a male gay sauna had been in operation for about 20 years but it is discreet and well run. It was estimated that 90% of those working there were not from Newport and that clients come from across Wales.

This pragmatic approach had enabled the police and Outreach services to work with sex worker establishments to improve not only physical safety but sexual health safety. For example, the

green card scheme developed by WIN is used by sex workers and establishments in the off street parlours. The card is stamped regularly at the sexual health clinic to indicate that the worker has been tested at the clinic. There is no other information on the card and thus the identity of the worker and private information is protected. The green card scheme also represents a form of internal regulation within the off street establishments. Participants explained that if a sex worker's green card is not up to date then the manager of the establishment may well not allow them to work there.

### Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

Visitation had enabled relationships of trust to be developed between the police and off street establishments and this in turn facilitated a good flow of information about issues such as trafficking, drug use and underage working.

Establishments are made aware of a wide range of issues that are unacceptable and the police representative made it very clear that establishments are aware that they *“could fall out of our procedure quite easily”*. However, the police explained that establishments and sex workers were keen to support the procedure with sex workers themselves self-monitoring their premises with regard to noise and anti-social behaviour and disturbance to neighbours and most often ‘frown upon’ other premises that attract noise and fighting etc.

Whenever concerns about trafficking arise the police act proactively and check on premises regularly where it is suggested that Eastern European women are working. According to the police representative there had been a general demographic shift in the population of Newport over a decade or more which also impacted on the ethnicity of women working in sex work, however this had not led to an overall increase in the numbers of workers or to women being trafficked:

***“At this present time (which could change)...there is no criminality or criminals running prostitution in Newport or forcing females or males into prostitution.”***

It was also pointed out that female premises tend to be run by females who, in the view of the police,

**“have got together...and are working of their own free will...if they have got suspicions of anybody who has been trafficked...or if their so-called boyfriend pushed them into it, then they will flag that up, and we can deal with that then.”**

## Code of conduct

The green card scheme and the internal rules and regulations within off street establishments prohibiting the use of drugs and alcohol on the premises as well as under-age sex work, and the identification of anti-social behaviour, human trafficking and sexual exploitation are all part of a ‘code of conduct’ that has been developed by WIN in association with the police and off street establishment managers.

## Examples of key innovations:

- The off street visitation procedure: dedicated police officers to the procedure have enabled relationships of trust to be built and this has led to a good flow of intelligence between police and off street establishments with sex workers more willing to report assaults.
- Through the visitation procedure the police and Outreach workers have a good awareness of the off street sex market in Newport and the police are able to identify sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- The implementation of an Ugly Mugs scheme as a mechanism to keep sex workers safe.
- The development of a ‘code of conduct’ represents an informal contract between the police and off street establishment managers. This code of conduct not only strives to address anti-social behaviour but also it aims to keep sex workers safe, encourages good sexual health practices and provides for consistent standards in off street establishments within Newport.

## Key limitations to multi-agency work:

- There is not an overarching sex work strategy in Newport with clear aims and objectives.

- The approach in Newport is reactive rather than strategic. The ‘prostitution group’ was not known to some key stakeholder agencies in Newport at the time of interview – the probation service for example.
- Intelligence is shared between WIN and the police however there are no formal mechanisms in place to share information with other agencies.
- Newport operates its own Ugly Mugs scheme; however there is a need to link into the UKNSWP national Ugly Mugs scheme to ensure that information regarding dangerous offenders is made available to other areas through a central data base.
- Services ‘link in’ to each other and WIN act as a conduit for sex workers to access a variety of services but there is no formal mechanism in place to facilitate this work. Referrals can be made to MARAC, SERAF and SARC but there is no sex worker focused crisis intervention procedures in place.
- Partnership work depends on a small number of dedicated staff but without a strategic approach the sustainability of quality support is tenuous.
- There is limited Outreach provision for street based workers and no strategic plan or formal mechanisms in place to ensure this important work is carried out. However, the expansion of Outreach work for street based sex workers is hampered by limited resources.
- Gaps in specialist knowledge were identified by participants within their own organisations.
- The need for training was identified; particularly this was highlighted as important for agencies that did not have regular contact with sex workers to counter judgemental attitudes.

**“Our work with WIN is great, but totally on an ad hoc basis. So if she [the Outreach worker] suddenly went sick or something, it would completely just crumble and there’d be nothing to replace her. It is just really on a kind of luck basis with that...things could almost just fall away, because it’s based on individuals’ kind of pushing the agenda forward.”**

### 3.2.3 Swansea:

#### Multi-agency development

An increase in intelligence relating to the numbers of sex workers being picked up in custody led to the start of a multi-agency focus on the issue of sex work in Swansea. The police and Outreach services carried out a number of Outreach operations to investigate the scale of the situation. According to one participant

**“it soon became clear that there was a fundamental problem...it needed a joined up approach, [so we] started to have meetings to see how we could approach the problem.”**

At the time of the research, there was a joined up focus on sex work in Swansea but a strategic plan was not in place or a multi-agency development lead. Nevertheless, despite multi-agency work being in its embryonic stages, service representative participants clearly demonstrated a drive and ambition to move the sex work agenda forward in Swansea.

Moreover, the model of service delivery within Cyrenians provides a crucial bedrock for the development of holistic support within an informal multi-agency framework. NHS services are located within Cyrenians, the organisation has an excellent working relationship with drug services, the police and homeless accommodation services in Swansea. Service users can access showers, food, health services and counselling within a ‘drop in’ environment that is situated within the ‘sex work’ locality.

#### Responding to street based sex workers

Street based sex work in Swansea is an emerging market. Participants recognised and reiterated several times that sex work was very transient in the city with women and men engaging in sex work on an opportunistic basis to earn money quickly. In sum, sex work was described as taking place on an ‘ad hoc’ or ‘needs must’ basis rather than it being an occupation:

**“...I’ve certainly known of it on a very ad hoc basis, where people are on the street. You know they are quite often under the influences of substances, quite often they’ll be engaged in begging or those sorts of things, but then they’ll (within that same area) also offer sex.”**

#### Similarly, another participant explained:

**“...more often than not for my clients sex work is going to be quite literally on a sort of needs must basis...as they term it ‘a turn’ in order to sometimes be paid, sometimes be paid for drugs, sometimes be paid in kind and more often than not for accommodation...that tends to be the way it works...”**

#### Regulatory responses

Street based sex work was described as far less visible in Swansea in comparison to Cardiff. This was believed to be due to sex workers arranging appointments with clients online and through the use of mobile phones. However, some street workers did regularly congregate outside the parlours. This could also be said to reflect the opportunistic nature of street sex work in Swansea where clients are regularly picked up before they enter a parlour.

Police responses to sex work in Swansea was to invoke section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 to move individuals on where they were causing anti-social behaviour that involved the use of drugs and or alcohol. At interview the police representative acknowledged that this was not ideal and possibly an outdated approach. The police in Swansea had been exploring the use of Section 17 Engagement and Support Orders and following the approach in Cardiff however sex work was not a clearly identified issue in

Swansea and furthermore it was too early to suggest that Engagement and Support Orders were in fact successful.

### Keeping street sex workers safe

Unlike the cities of Cardiff and Newport, participants explained that sex workers moved between the on and off street markets. Whether a sex worker was working on or off street correlated with periods of 'stability' or 'instability' and drug use.

### Physical safety

Participants were clearly concerned about the safety and vulnerabilities of sex workers. Particularly there was a general consensus that drugs and sex work were inextricably linked in Swansea. During the research period the 'Ugly Mugs' initiative was implemented and services were proactively informing sex workers of dangerous offenders and urging sex workers to report any incidents of violence. However, participants made it clear that there was a great deal of work to be done to address judgemental attitudes. For example one participant stated:

**“ I am not saying that I subscribe to this opinion, but there is the alternative that some people might say if you make it safer then make it more acceptable...these are not my words but you know you hear that argument...people who are working in this trade who put themselves at risk they deserve...safekeeping and safeguarding as much as anyone else does...some people feel they obviously [have to do it]...we have to accept that. ”**

### Sexual health safety

Sexual health Outreach was well established in Swansea and indeed the sexual health nurse was the main point of contact for sex workers working out of parlours. Partnership work with Cyrenians also provided a clear pathway into sexual health and homelessness services for both the sex worker population in Swansea.

### Crisis intervention

There are no crisis formal intervention mechanisms in place. Services do make referrals to the GU clinic and the SARC but it was pointed out that sex workers are very reluctant to attend these services.

### Responding to off street sex workers

Parlours in Swansea are predominantly 'shop front' style. Some participants explained that Swansea was an unusual situation due to the 'needs must' approach of sex workers who moved between the on and off street markets and this in turn had resulted in some 'quality parlours' that would not employ drug users and some 'less quality' parlours that were more tolerant of drug use on the premises.

The majority of service provision is targeted at off street workers. Sexual health Outreach in the parlours has been taking place for several years. However while participants believed that the police in Swansea did visit the parlours to ensure that sex workers were safe there is no dedicated police team to carry out this work and parlour visitation appears to take place sporadically.

### Building up trustful relationships

Very good relationships exist in Swansea between off street establishment managers, sex workers and sexual health Outreach. However, representatives of Outreach services explained that off street workers were still very reluctant to report any incidents of violence to the police.

### Understanding the realities of the off street market

Sexual Health Outreach work in the city had facilitated an awareness of the 'hidden' populations of sex workers (both male and female) who work from their homes. Some participants were also aware of the growing sex work internet enabled market in the city.

### Human trafficking and sexual exploitation

While checks on parlours are carried out by the police to ensure that sex workers are safe and also to identify any trafficked individuals, several participants spoke of their worries of sexual exploitation taking place in 'houses'.

A sexual health representative also explained that while she believed that the overwhelming majority of sex workers in parlours were over the age of eighteen years, through working with off street workers she had become very concerned about grooming for sex work and the need for preventative intervention:

**“...some of these girls since the age of 15 have been groomed...one girl was put in a massage parlour when she was about 13 by her mum...that was for drugs again, because mom was a heroin addict, she is probably the youngest I can think of.”**

### Examples of key innovations:

- Cyrenians provide a centre of support for sex workers in Swansea and through joined up working with other agencies a wide range of sex worker needs can be addressed in a safe environment.
- Outreach work has expanded to include sex workers working from the privacy of their own homes.
- Early preventative sexual health Outreach work takes place with sex workers and young people (predominantly females) in the community focusing on: contraception, sexually transmitted infections and self esteem building.
- The links between homelessness and sex work are well recognised; Cyrenians (a Homeless Charity) has secured funding to explore wide ranging issues associated with sex work including sexual exploitation and mental health.
- Sexual health treatment and contraception is given to women working in sex work establishments in Swansea (on sex work premises). A relationship of trust has developed that has also facilitated engagement with other outreach services to meet other sex worker needs in addition to sexual health.
- The implementation of the UKNSWP ‘Ugly Mugs’ scheme as a mechanism to keep sex workers safe.

### Key limitations to multi-agency work:

- There is no coordinated multi-agency strategic approach. The research clearly indicated that some services were unaware of each other but they were all, in some capacity, engaging with sex workers.
- Reaching out to sex workers who work from their own homes is hampered by a lack of resources. According to the sexual health Outreach representative, this specific Outreach work has expanded through ‘word of mouth’ and without a strategic plan and adequate resources many sex workers who work privately are falling through the net.
- A collaborative visitation procedure between Outreach services and the police could build up relationships of trust and encourage sex workers to have the confidence to report incidents of violence.
- There are no formal crisis intervention mechanisms in place.

## PHASE 2 (A) Summary

Cardiff and Newport have developed approaches which address the needs of EITHER on or off street sex workers. Resources have been targeted at either the on or off street markets in accordance with local priorities and with the overriding aim of protecting the community from the negative impact of sex work. Comparatively, given the mobility of sex workers in Swansea (workers regularly working at different times on and off street) support services in Swansea appear to focus on the individual.

All stakeholder agencies recognise the need to protect sex workers as members of the community under the umbrella of community safety and also public health. However, a lack of funding and resources, was at the time of the research, a serious limitation to the development of multi-agency work in Swansea and to the expansion of multi-agency work in Cardiff and Newport – work which is needed to ensure a comprehensive response to all the sex work markets.

Overall, stakeholder agencies within criminal justice and public health have made great strides to tackle the needs of sex workers within a multi-agency or partnership framework. All areas adopt a harm reduction approach focusing on the vulnerabilities of sex workers and their safety, sexual health and general wellbeing. There are many examples of innovative partnership work across the three cities. Nevertheless, sex workers made it clear that services can be improved by providing housing and access to benefits: these are 'key' priorities for sex workers (see Phase 1, research question 5). While partnership work may combine housing or link into housing and while partners may be able to support sex workers with financial advice, these issues need to be at the forefront of multi-agency / partnership work.

All participants acknowledged the need to develop a regional response – with the impetus that wider partnership work can ensure that sex workers are able to access services across the three cities and those clients who harm can be identified. Sharing intelligence was considered vitally important, and in the words of one participant 'to prevent a catastrophe like Ipswich'. Some participants also considered a regional response as an important step towards understanding the relationship between drug use and sex work along the M4 corridor.

However there is also a need to share good practice. The research found that Cardiff SWOT had been attended in the past by outreach services in Newport where information had been shared; Cardiff representatives had considered visiting Newport to find out about its off street visitation procedure. Swansea had made several attempts to visit Cardiff to learn from its Outreach team and an Outreach worker from Newport had offered support to services in Swansea. There is certainly much good work and local knowledge to be shared and this perhaps should be the foundation of any regional response.

***“ It’s very parochial everyone protecting their own area and not sharing good practice, or if one area is willing to share good practice the other area may not wish to take that up because of that Cardiff, Newport, Swansea divide which is very parochial...I think it’s quite sad because for the women who are sex workers and the men who are purchasing sex along the M4 corridor...the need to share information about dangerous issues is very great, you know we are trying to protect women...it’s frustrating. ”***

### 3.3 Phase 2 (B):

#### Swansea – voices of the community and service development.

Phase 2 (A) identified Swansea as an geographical area with an emerging street sex worker population. It also clearly indicated that the sex worker population was atypical of other sex work markets in that there was significant mobility between the on and off street markets; this phenomenon appeared to be strongly associated with significant drug use amongst sex workers. There was a clear will amongst service providers to develop multi-agency work; however multi-agency work at the time of the Phase 2 (A) research was in its embryonic stages. SWRW determined that partnership work in the Swansea area could support stakeholders to develop a base of knowledge and in doing so empower services to further multi-agency development.



## Research question 7: Can engagement with services for sex workers and service users lead to mutual empowerment?

### *What did we do?*

We held several strategic research meetings with key stakeholder organisations. Working in partnership with Cyrenians Cymru we distributed questionnaires to sex workers and held 10 engagement events with sex workers between July 2013 and May 2014. One aim of this was to empower services with more in-depth knowledge regarding the concerns and needs of sex workers and to locate gaps in service provision. Other aims included bringing services and sex workers together in a safe and welcoming setting to build up relationships of trust, to enhance sex worker self-esteem and, through in-depth interviewing, to provide sex workers with the opportunity to have their voices heard and included in the service development process. The overall goal being to bring sex workers, agencies / stakeholders together to begin a process towards developing and delivering safe and constructive multi-agency responses to sex work.

### *Results*

#### **Engagement events**

The events were hosted by Cyrenians Cymru and organised so that women could drop in and stay for as little or as long as they wished usually between 4pm and 8pm. Sex worker attendees were invited through a process of collaborative Outreach work between staff from Cyrenians, sexual health and IOIS.

#### **Attendees**

- 46 sex workers over the 10 month period with approximately 4-12 sex workers attending each meeting and an average number of 7. Attendees were predominantly female with 3 males and one trans female worker. Some attendees opted not to provide their dates of birth but for those that did the age range was between 19 and 33 with a mean age of 28. Some attendees attended several events.
- Several agencies and stakeholders attended the events regularly including: Cyrenians staff; Sexual Health Outreach; Homelessness Outreach; Gibran (UK) Ltd;

and on one occasion an expert in substance misuse attended representing the Welsh Government.

- Six members of the SWRW team including four peer researchers attended the events with an average of 4/5 team members attending each event.

#### **Activities**

- Food was provided and a variety of activities took place at the events that were designed to create a welcoming social environment. Those attending the events took part in sociable activities including: bag making, clothing up-cycling and customising, cake making and cake decorating, and beauty treatments to boost self-esteem.
- The aim was to facilitate the engagement of service users with service providers and to make that engagement a 'positive' experience where attendees did not simply focus on their problems.

#### **Services provided**

- Attendees were provided with the opportunity to be screened by a specialist homeless nurse and the sexual health GUM outreach nurse (immediately on site) in a private and confidential space. Screening enabled health professionals to immediately refer sex workers for further treatment where necessary. A range of health and sexual health ailments were treated on site with the support of expert medical Outreach workers.
- Attendees were also signposted by Cyrenians to other services aimed at addressing their individual needs such as accommodation, routes into education, counselling and peer support programmes.
- Cyrenians provided information on Ugly Mugs reporting to those that attended and where appropriate completed Ugly Mugs reports.
- Sex workers who attended events were given discreet personal alarms for their safety.
- At all of the events, those attending had access to clothing, a meal, condoms, hand sanitisers, toiletries, as well as receiving practical and emotional support from qualified outreach staff.

## Research

- Within a social and somewhat ‘therapeutic’ atmosphere attendees were invited to take part in the SWRW project and to share with the team their opinions, views and life experiences. Some sex workers opted to undertake more formal interviews in a private space and others simply wanted to ‘off load’ and have an informal chat.
- While the information retrieved from the engagement events was important to the SWRW team in the context of ensuring that the voices of sex workers were heard in the development of policy, practice and multi-agency partnership work, this did not take priority at the events; the priority was to break down barriers and build up relationships of trust to enable services to develop good service provision that can meet the needs of sex workers. The research findings are documented in the last section of Phase 2 (B) of this report. The findings have empowered services with the knowledge to forge partnerships and to pursue a formal multi-agency strategy for Swansea. In the words of one service provider:

**“To date, Swansea has been striving towards identifying the ‘real’ problem of sex working in this area and there has been a substantial shift in recognising this cause for concern. [This] partnership working has been poignant in identifying this.”**

## Outcomes

Feedback from sex workers attending the events as well as service providers enabled SWRW to identify key direct outcomes from the engagement events.

- The Cyrenians homeless drop in centre has been used in the evenings (when the centre is usually closed) for exclusive use by women and men involved in sex work. Through hosting the engagement events service providers have been able to engage with sex workers who otherwise would not have attended the service.

- There has been a lot of continued interest in the events by the women who have attended.
- The beginnings of multi agency partnership with local services in Swansea have been established. Particularly, partnership work between Cyrenians, the Drug Intervention Programme and NHS Outreach staff has been cemented:

**“Sex Work Research Wales has been a great support to Cyrenians Cymru, they have helped us build effective working partnerships and provided this most vulnerable group of sex workers with engagement activities such as the ‘pamper events’. These events have enabled us to bring together this sex working community, overcome barriers and increase the safety of this very isolated group.”**

**(Centre Manager,  
Cyrenians)**

- 46 sex workers were made aware of the range of service provision in Swansea through the engagement events. This figure is likely to significantly increase by ‘word of mouth’.
- The engagement events provided sex workers with the opportunity to directly access sexual health services at the events. Several sexual ailments have been treated and several sex workers have been referred for treatment that can only take place in a clinic environment.
- IOIS was able to make fast track referrals into drug treatment and referrals were made to counselling services to provide additional support.
- The SWRW team facilitated the implementation of ‘Ugly Mugs’, providing training to stakeholder agencies in Swansea. Sex workers are now the recipients of ‘Ugly Mugs’ alerts and they are being actively encouraged through Outreach and other service providers to report any incidents of

violence to the police. A number of sex workers identified 'Ugly Mugs' and reports have been made to South Wales Police.

- Attendees received and valued peer support. Feedback from sex workers suggested that the events had had a positive impact on their lives in the context of just being able to talk:

**“ This is what I've been talking about, getting it off my chest. I can leave now I feel much better; a massive weight has just been lifted...I can't talk to anyone like I'm talking to you. I can't talk to anyone about it...because they are not understanding. It's very hidden and frowned upon and secretive, no one really wants to talk about it. I feel a lot better. ”**

**“ Just to sit down and have a chat...I'd rather sit and talk to people than bottle everything up; when I hit rock bottom...it gets things off my chest. ”**

- Cyrenians and partner agencies in Swansea intend to continue holding 'engagement' events:

**“ [The events provide] a safe place for sex workers to attend to speak to workers from relevant organisations...additionally, [they] provide a non-judgemental environment where individuals can relax for a period of time...individuals who attend the events are keen to re-attend. This speaks volumes, particularly in light of the evidence which shows that such individuals are amongst the most challenging to engage. ”**  
(IOIS representative).

- Base line data has been collated to enable services to understand better the complex needs of sex workers and this will assist services to forge more formal multi-agency alliances.

## Research question 8: Can the voices of the community make an important contribution to policy and practice?

A key aim of the SWRW project was to build up knowledge to assist service development for sex workers and in doing so have regard to the priorities and concerns identified by both the wider community and the sex worker community. In this regard, the aims of SWRW were not dissimilar to those identified in national policy which encourages widespread consultation at the local level with the community, including those who are engaged in sex work (Home Office, 2006; Home Office 2011).

### What did we do?

Community peer researchers engaged with residents and businesses in specific geographical areas of Swansea where sex work is known to take place as identified in Phase 2 (A). Peer researchers administered a questionnaire and interviewed participants. 20 residents and 38 businesses provided their views and opinions of both on and off street sex work in the area.

Surveys were also distributed to sex workers in Swansea by service providers. This was followed by 10 engagement events hosted by Cyrenians where sex workers were invited to take part in semi-structured qualitative interviews as well as less formal discussions that were carried out by the research team and peer researchers. 44 sex workers provided their views and opinions and shared their lived experiences.

## Key findings from engagement with the Swansea community

### Resident Responses

#### Street based sex work

- Street sex work was identified as a crime and disorder issue by only 2 respondents.
- The majority of respondents either 'didn't know' (n=8) or believed that the numbers of sex workers in the locality were less than 10 (n=10).
- The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they either 'hardly ever' or 'never' saw street sex workers (n=16).
- Only 1 respondent identified street sex work as an issue which affected the quality of their 'everyday life'.

#### Off street sex work

- The majority of respondents were aware of indoor sex work in the locality.
- None of the residents expressed strong opinions (either positive or negative) or concerns about off street sex work.

### Business Responses:

#### On street work

- Crime and disorder in the area was identified by businesses as being primarily anti-social behaviour associated with drug and alcohol use.
- Out of 38 businesses: 25 were 'not aware' of street based prostitution with 12 indicating they were 'aware', and 1 indicating that they 'didn't know'.
- Businesses did not indicate that street based sex work had a negative impact on their business.
- The majority of businesses indicated that they believed that the numbers of street based sex workers in the locality was 10 or under with 9 businesses believing that there were no prostitutes working in the locality.
- 35 out of 38 business respondents indicated that they 'hardly ever' (n=12) or 'never' (n=23) saw street based sex workers.

#### Off street sex work

- The majority of business respondents indicated that they perceived that there were 5 or less off-street establishments in the locality (n=29); 7 respondents didn't know and only 1 respondent believed that there was over 5.
- None of the respondents reported that indoor establishments had a negative impact on their business.

### Residents and Businesses:

- Responses did not indicate that sex work (both on and off street) was a community concern.
- Only 4 respondents out of 58 (2 residents and 2 businesses) agreed with the statement 'I think prostitutes are a nuisance' with the overwhelming majority (n=51) of respondents indicating that they 'disagreed' with the statement.

- Generally, the perceptions of residents and businesses regarding sex work were found to be very similar to those reported by Sagar, Jones and Harris in 2010 in Cardiff: opinions in Swansea were divided on whether or not people 'should be allowed to buy and sell sex' as well as 'understanding why some people might need to sell sex', with 50% of community participants (n=29) indicating that they worried about the safety of sex workers in the area.

### Key findings from engagement with the Swansea sex worker community

The following information provides a brief overview of the demographics of our sex worker participants and their views and opinions about service provision and their needs. However, it was also important to SWRW to allow the voices of sex workers to be heard clearly. In particular, during interviews, sex worker participants were very keen to explain their lives, their feelings about being judged by society, their feelings about their own identity and to emphasise how 'ordinary' they are.

### Demographics

- 42 participants were female and 2 male.
- All but two participants described their nationality: 39 participants described themselves as White British / White Welsh, with one participant describing themselves as Asian British and two as Romanian.
- 40 participants reported working in Swansea, 2 in Cardiff; 1 in London; 1 in the West Midlands.
- Ages ranged from 19 – 44 years.
- 19 respondents indicated that they had been selling sex for over 5 years with 14 reporting selling sex for between 1 and 5 years.

### Mobility

- There is a lot of mobility between on and off street and this is not typical of other cities including Cardiff and Newport. Participants tended to work whenever and wherever they could: on street; in parlours; through the internet and use of mobile phones; at their own homes; at the client's home.

### Accessing Services

- 42 participants were aware of services/support services in the Swansea area with a majority expressing an awareness of sexual health services, drug and alcohol services, the police, accident and emergency, general practitioner. Half of the respondents also indicated an awareness of social services and mental health services.
- Barriers to accessing services were predominantly noted as not wanting to disclose working in the sex industry; lack of confidence; fear of authorities; fear of being believed; a lack of money. Language as a barrier to accessing services was only reported by one participant.
- The need for an Outreach service was most commonly cited as a necessary support mechanism to assist sex workers to access other services, although at 'engagement events' several participants were aware that Outreach was being provided by Cyrenians.

*“I come here to speak to Rachel, she is brilliant, she got me a B & B then she got me involved with the flat which was really good.”*

- The support of GPs and local sexual health nurses to assist workers in accessing services was also identified:

*“The sexual health nurse comes to me; I would not go if she didn't.”*

### Service provision and meeting need

- Participants were asked to list the three most important things that a service could do to help them. The need for support through listening and non-judgemental services was strongly identified:

*“Be there and listen.”*

*“Someone to listen to me.”*

*“Someone to listen and not judge.”*

*“Someone who doesn't judge, to avoid saying I understand when they don't.”*

- The complexity of sex worker needs and the desire for a holistic service to meet those needs emerged clearly from the data:
- **Homelessness and unsecured housing** was identified by 31 out of 44 participants. Only 9 survey respondents stated their last place of sleep as their 'own home'; 5 respondents (either by survey or interview) indicated that they were homeless and 10 reporting staying with friends / family. Staying in supported hostels / shelters was reported by another 4 participants and 3 others described sleeping in their place of work. 13 respondents stated they had exchanged sex for a bed for the night.

“*My main priority is somewhere to live...I'm under probation and [probation]rules are if I don't stay in my sister's house every night then I can get recalled...me and my sister are arguing and if she kicks me out I'm going to get recalled so I can't win either way.*”

“*I need money to get a place to live...really, that's all you know.*”

- The majority of respondents reported **health issues** including drug and alcohol abuse (two respondents indicated liver and heart problems), mental health issues including bipolar disorder, depression and anxiety were reported as well as self-harming and sexual health related problems including miscarriage.
- 14 respondents had been in **care** or under the care of social / welfare services due to a variety of issues including: drug use by parents; family break down; bereavement in the family (mum or dad); domestic abuse.
- The majority of respondents (n=32) reported that they had been involved with the **criminal justice system**. Over half of the respondents provided qualitative comments indicating that this was predominantly due to drug use and shop lifting to fund a drug habit.

Only one sex worker indicated that she had been arrested for soliciting in the past.

- The majority of respondents had experienced some form of **domestic abuse** (sexual, physical, emotional and financial) whilst being in a relationship. 11 respondents at some point had been forced to sell sex by partners; 4 others by family and friends.

“*[He] battered me in front of his Nana and she didn't say a word*”

“*...he used to beat me up and that and he'd buy me things to make it better....*”

“*[I] stabbed my partner in September, he is in HMP, he was always violent...he had also bit me in the past.*”

“*...my last relationship, he had the card and had all the money from sex work.*”

- 18 respondents reported violence from clients including physical and sexual violence as well as threatening behaviour and refusing to pay:

“*One man asked me if he could be violent whilst having sex. I asked how violent? I agreed. It wasn't mild, he battered me – I felt obliged to let him continue.*”

“*I've been attacked, had money robbed off me...I've gone out on house visits and been held in houses.*”

“*Client punched me – hit me with an iron bar. I jumped out of a car as I was kept in there.*”

- 36 respondents indicated drug and / or alcohol misuse and associated health problems. Predominantly drug use was associated with heroin and crack cocaine however 3 participants also indicated they used meow, ecstasy and crystal meth and amphetamines, and 2 participants also took prescription drugs. 25 participants stated that they had exchanged sex for drugs.
- A key concern amongst drug using sex workers was the inability to get 'clean' due to the length of time it took to get methadone prescribed. Several sex workers explained that because of this they perceived going to prison to be a better option:

*“I've said to my sister, I don't want bail, I'll refuse bail, I don't want any order, because even when you take a DTO order it takes like a month before you get a prescription, you have to shoplift in that month again and you get caught again and it just makes everything ten times worse...you have to get down to town every day for these appointments...to go and have a few weeks in jail, then you get the script the next day.”*

*“I don't want to go back to jail...I'm a terrible shop lifter... [I've] got caught and been in jail a few times... [but I've] asked to have a sentence...that's the only way I can get clean because of the script the next day.”*

*“It's stupid because around here it's going to take about 6-8 weeks to get on a script but if I go to jail get on a script in two days.”*

However, one participant explained how drug 'pushers' preyed on people who were trying to keep 'clean':

*“When you come out and you're going to pick up your script...they are there offering it to you in the chemist...they linger round these places...you want to stay clean but it's hard to refuse”*

- Responses indicated that there is clearly a will amongst drug using sex workers to get 'clean' but there is also an **expectation that services will provide wide ranging support** and particularly assist in finding **secure accommodation and employment**, for example:

*“...loads of people say to me don't go [to drug treatment services], it's my choice. I want to go, I want to go and change my life...if you want to sit here and carry on being on drugs and selling yourself and drinking...I know at the end of the day I'll be a the better person. I know I'll have achieved something, they will get me accommodation, and they will get me a job....”*

- Overall participants made it clear that they required practical assistance to support them with life issues:

*“Keep me busy and find volunteering work”*

*“To get back into full time work”*

*“To find a home I could call my own”*

*“To get my housing and support”*

*“Find me accommodation which is suitable”*

*“Help get my daughter back”*

## Life events and points of crisis

Participants were very keen to explain how they became involved in sex work. Data collated from in-depth interviews provided a clear indication of the range of life events and points of crisis that can lead an individual to make a decision to sell sex:

“*My mum passed away. My family tried like, I don't know which way to put it but they tried having me look after my two brothers, the youngest one...I couldn't cope...I was completely unprepared.*”

“*I'd been working as a shop fitter of all things and the contracts came to an end, we had been paid weekly and I knew that even if I went to get a proper job...finding a job, applying for it was going to take me anywhere between 2 and 4 weeks then the interview...then working maybe a month in hand...I had a heroin addiction, I had a mortgage to pay...I needed money tonight or tomorrow at the latest.*”

“*I went through a few problems with my partner who was on drugs for years, he had an affair with my sister...I had a breakdown and ended up putting £20 in the car and drove to Bristol, as far as it could get me...I started talking to one of the girls there and that was my first experience of sex work.*”

“*I thought he was a partner at the time, I was 14 and he was 28...but he put me into work and then I started getting a habit on heroin and ever since then I just carried on working...he introduced me to the drugs...introduced me to the work...I was 14 and vulnerable.*”

**““ My mother kicked me out...my mother’s boyfriend raped me [at age of 15], I told my mother...she didn’t believe me, she believed her boyfriend...so I left and never went back...I can’t forgive her...I was hanging around with all the street people...before you know it you’re on drugs...here I am now, twenty-eight. ””**

**““ I wasn’t in to drugs at all; it was just the money side of being able to provide for my daughter, getting the best of what I could get her. ””**

**““ One of my friends was doing it and one night this bloke said to me I’ll give you £100...I was only sixteen...it led from there...no one was going to put food on the table for me. ””**

**““ My post office book was stolen...I had no money which is why I took the kids to their grans. I couldn’t feed them, I couldn’t put the electric on or nothing else, although I had no habit, I just couldn’t do it. They put me under investigation for it but I was cleared. Basically that’s how I got where I did. ””**

## Secrecy and stigma

Interviewees took the time to explain why they feared / chose not to disclose sex work as an occupation to services and why they are reluctant to report incidents of violence to the police. As the following quotations clarify, the fear of disclosure is inherently connected to feelings of being judged and stigmatised:

**““ I’ve never been in that situation where I’ve had to go to the police, because I don’t know what they would think...I think I would be disgusted and embarrassed...what would they say? I don’t know...I think they’d blame me.”**

**“[The Police] should be more understanding. Just because you’re a working girl they shouldn’t think that you deserve it...because you don’t you know? When you say no, no is no. ””**

Likewise, sex workers spoke about how they believe that their family, friends and other members of the community would judge them negatively if they found out they were engaged in sex work and how this impacts on perceptions of their own identity:

**““ I’m constantly worrying...Swansea is my local town, anyone could see me walking in there [the parlour], I’m constantly looking, and I’ve got to peek around the wall before I leave...it does get to me sometimes. ””**

**““ ...people think oh she’s a sex worker, she’s dirty. ””**

**““ If my mother found out, even now, even though we are not close...I still feel disgusted, she’d look upon me as degrading, shaming the family...it’s true, I am. ””**

**““ [My family] would disown me straight away, they would, they will. I’d never see my nieces and nephews again.... ””**

**“ I have got respect for myself, I know I have...I have got respect for myself...I have got respect for myself – it’s mad! ”**

## Ordinary people

Several participants were keen to stress that although society stigmatises sex workers and defines them by their occupation, they are in fact ordinary people, with ordinary desires and wants:

**“ I’ve never met anybody who goes into it business minded...it’s always been because of some crisis event in their life, whether its drugs or homelessness, loss of family, family breakdown...so even though we are ordinary girls, extra ordinary circumstances caused us to do such a job. ”**

**“ We were sort of talking in work about the fact that most of us have got very ordinary ambitions in our lives...nothing much greater than a nice place to live, comfortable, being able to put the heating on without worrying about the cost of it...stuff like that. ”**

**“ I’m now a male escort and male prostitute. I work quite regularly and I’m a full time carer for my mum because she is disabled, she’s got cancer... [I] pray to god she comes through it. My dad died quite a few years ago. I have two dogs and 7 brothers and sisters. ”**

**“ I was in Tesco’s and I really had ordinary things in my trolley but I also had underwear, some KY jelly, a pack of condoms and a pair of fishnets...I thought to myself oh god if anybody saw my trolley they would know exactly...but the woman next to me in the queue was talking to me because I had an orchid, she was talking to me about plant growing [I’m] trying to get across how ordinary we actually are. ”**

**“ Girls are so ordinary, people’s sisters, daughters wives etc... We are sympathetic characters; we are ordinary people doing a pretty abnormal job. ”**

**“ You’ve got to get your make-up done, get your hair done, look a certain way, act a certain way...yeah it’s so much glamour but so much more fakery, and then it sort of becomes what we actually are – isn’t it? ”**

## Phase 2 (B) Summary

### Empowering service providers and service users

- The engagement events held in Swansea successfully brought together sex workers and service providers. The events were also successful in that many sex workers who attended felt confident to participate not just in the many activities that were provided but also to engage with sexual health experts, drug treatment services, housing support, advice and counselling; and to take part in the SWRW research element of the project.
- The social and welcoming atmosphere created at the events enabled attendees to 'talk', and feedback from attendees suggested that this in itself was therapeutic.
- The tentacles from partnership engagement were far reaching. Services were able to develop firm working relationships and several services participated in 'Ugly Mugs' training. Feedback from services and service users indicated that sex workers not only appreciated receiving information on 'Ugly Mugs' but that they were also more likely to report incidents of violence.
- Services confirmed in feedback that having established good working relationships they were confident in pursuing more formal multi-agency work in the future.

### The voices of the community

- As already noted, sex work in Swansea is very unusual in that there is a lot of mobility between on and off street work. However, neither 'on' nor 'off' street sex work was identified as a community issue in Swansea: the overwhelming majority of community participants (51 out of 58) disagreed with the statement 'I think prostitutes are a nuisance'.

### The voices of the sex work community

- The participants who took part in this phase of the research provided their opinions about service provision: generally sex workers want a service that listens to them, that can meet their emotional and physical needs (including sexual health and drug treatment) but also a service that can provide practical support to attain housing and employment.

- 'Listening' to sex workers was a key theme that was found to run throughout the survey responses and the interviews that took place. Quite simply, the participants wanted to be heard. And when listening to the voices of the participants it is clear to see that the stigma and judgement sex workers face in their daily lives impacts on their own perceptions of 'self' and consequentially their inability to disclose their occupations to services and to report incidents of violence to the police.
- Participants really tried to emphasise that they were 'ordinary' people who may have lived through hardship and experienced various points of crisis in their lives, but they were ordinary people albeit doing a not so ordinary job.

### Contribution to policy and practice development

- The 2006 Coordinated Prostitution Strategy states that 'prostitution' cannot be tolerated by communities. The Swansea findings clearly present an evidence base to counter this assertion. Sex work is not defined as a 'nuisance' by the community in Swansea and many members of the community are concerned about the safety of sex workers. This finding has important implications for the future development of multi-agency work in Swansea which should (as Hester and Westmarland suggested ten years ago in 2004), perceive sex work to be a welfare issue rather than a policing issue that requires a punitive response. However, there are safety issues for sex workers and there is a need to build up relationships of trust with the police to encourage sex workers to report with confidence all forms of violence (including domestic violence).
- The Swansea findings clearly provide a snapshot of the complexity of sex work. Importantly, they demonstrate that sex work does not necessarily lead to problematic drug use or vice versa, but events and points of crisis in a person's life can lead to sex work, drug use, and problematic drug using sex work.
- Several sex workers explained to us how they struggled to 'get clean' and 'stay clean' with some perceiving that prison is a better / quicker route to getting clean. This finding is regrettable; it seems that there is much work

to be done with regard to the availability and timeliness of drug treatment; particularly given that drug intervention measures have been introduced over the last decade or so to provide the courts with an alternative to a custodial sentence.

- Policy and practice needs to focus on the whole person and not simply on criminal activity (drug use and sex work) and public health (sexual health). Sex workers, whether they are drug using or not, require practical assistance to attain stability in their lives and this can be as basic as secure housing and access to benefits and employment. And, in understanding better 'the lived experiences' of sex workers it becomes evident that these needs have to be met simultaneously.
- Stigma and the fear of being judged are clearly 'the' obstacles to sex workers disclosing their occupations to services and to reporting violence against them. Unless policy and practice begins a process of de-stigmatisation sex workers who are 'ordinary' people with aspirations like everyone else, will continue to be socially isolated and reluctant to seek help and support when and where it is needed.



## 4. Conclusions and Recommendation

### Key conclusions:

- There is evidence of sex work in every local authority area of Wales however it is most concentrated in the South Wales area.
- There is little knowledge in Wales regarding the off street sex market; particularly this is true of the internet enabled sex work community. Male sex workers and transgender sex workers specifically are falling under the policy and practice radar.
- Sex work is not a priority for law enforcers across Wales. Sex work only features as a contested community issue in a handful of wards in the South Wales area. Where it is contested, proactive policing takes place within a multi-agency capacity.
- Sex work is concentrated in the cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. In these cities multi-agency work is either established or developing to meet the complex needs of sex workers. There are many examples of innovative harm reduction work within the cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea; however service user responses indicated that the importance of practical assistance in providing access to secure housing, benefits and employment is perhaps underestimated in partnership work.
- A lack of resources is a key obstacle to the furtherance of multi-agency work that aims to provide a comprehensive response to the off and on street sex work markets.
- There is a need to develop a regional response to sex work across the South Wales area, particularly given that the cities of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea are all located along the M4 corridor. A regional response would facilitate the sharing of intelligence to address violence against sex workers, ensure that sex workers can access services if working in a different city; the sharing of innovative work and the development of regional models of good practice.
- Sex workers are a particularly hard to reach community however the 'engagement events' in Swansea demonstrate that events that bring sex workers together with service providers can achieve many positive and often empowering outcomes.
- The voices of the community, including the sex work community, have much to contribute to the development of policy and practice and indeed multi-agency responses to sex work.
- The stigma society imposes on sex workers has to be tackled. This issue was highlighted in all phases of the SWRW project research. Stigma and the fear of being judged were shown to be key obstacles to sex workers accessing services and in reporting violence in the qualitative data collated from sex workers. The issue also reared its head as a key obstacle in the qualitative data collated from some service providers.
- Sex worker participants emphasise that they do not want to be judged for their engagement in sex work; they want to be listened to; they want society and services to understand that they are ordinary people who sometimes need help either to keep safe and healthy while engaging in sex work or support and assistance to move out of sex work – whether they are drug using sex workers or not.

## Key recommendations:

- Phase 1 of this report carried out three 'one day counts' of individuals engaged in sex work who advertise via the internet and in newspapers. The counts demonstrated that engaging in and accessing commercial sex is increasing in visibility. There is a need across Wales to develop a service provision that reaches out to this visible cohort of off street sex workers.
- Male and transgender sex workers need to be recognised / acknowledged by services and also within strategic sex worker policy development.
- Sex work is rarely a public nuisance. Sex work is primarily a welfare issue not a policing issue in Wales and should be addressed through a harm reduction approach.
- Providing access to secure housing, benefits and employment opportunities should be at the forefront of multi-agency partnership work.
- Sex workers are not invisible and policy and practice must not ignore the voices of those it claims to be concerned for. The stigma associated with sex work needs to be proactively tackled within individual stakeholder services and within multi-agency partnership work.
- There is a need to develop and appropriately resource specialist sex worker services.
- 'Ugly Mugs' should be rolled out across Wales.
- A regional response to sex work in the South Wales area should be developed to facilitate the sharing of intelligence and innovative practice.
- Given that sex work takes place in all local authority areas, consideration should be given to developing All Wales good practice guidance.

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