

Points to Consider When Undertaking Operational Activity At Sex Working Premises – Sex Worker Perspective

When planning and conducting operational activity into trafficking and sexual exploitation it will be important to consider the impact of the operation on those encountered and specifically the likelihood of encountering sex workers who have not been trafficked or exploited.

In line with the NPCC Guidance on Sex Working and Prostitution it is important that law enforcement activity focuses on building trust and confidence. The following points, reflecting the view of some working with the sex industry, may act as useful prompts for police forces and law enforcement agencies when planning activity such as visits to suspected brothels:

Points to consider

- Media – consideration of inappropriate reporting by film crews during the execution of warrants / arrests at premises involving sex work, i.e. media access to visually record vulnerable victims of trafficking being removed from premises whilst undressed.
- Safeguarding – ensure that appropriately trained officers are in attendance in order to safeguard vulnerable victims and their families, and that victims / sex workers are not simply removed from the premises without consideration of dependents / family members.
- Appropriate response to the intelligence picture – consideration of communication with partner agencies, local sex work projects or local MSHT projects that reassures that the activity is proportionate based on the intelligence and background of suspects.
- Female officers should be in attendance where possible. Consideration should be given to the perception of male officers watching female victims / sex workers in various state of undress / getting dressed (the reasons for observation may or may not be understood).
- Ensure dignity in allowing those present who may be in 'working clothes' to get dressed or change.
- Police officers / agency workers should be in possession of information and identification in different languages where possible.
- Ensure those in attendance from all agencies are trained in MSHT and can provide an appropriate response (this includes any sex work project workers also).

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- Liaise with local sex work or MSHT outreach projects for operations and consider their attendance, if appropriate. Ensure further engagement following operations to confirm that support is in place for victims, and to build trust with projects to facilitate intelligence flow.
- Demonstrate professional conduct and language at all times.
- Consideration that 'weeks of action' alone are not conducive to building trust and collaborative partnerships with sex workers and outreach projects. Intensification activity should ideally be part of a longer term plan tackling this issue in order to build strong working relationships with local partners and projects.

The above list is not exhaustive and police forces and law enforcement agencies should consider engaging with local partners and projects for further guidance.

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