

Recommendations

Women who exist on the streets as sex workers feel they have no other option. Until their housing, social support, and employment choices are widened, women will continue to experience prostitution and homelessness.

The review puts forward the following recommendations:

- local and central government must acknowledge that many women engaged in street-based prostitution are effectively sleeping on the streets
 - a range of options, including crisis and supported accommodation, is required to meet the needs of homeless women working on the streets as prostitutes
 - initiatives aimed at reducing crime and anti-social behaviour associated with street-based prostitution must offer drug treatment in conjunction with appropriate housing
 - social housing providers should ensure that women trying to exit prostitution have access to accommodation that is safe, with intensive and flexible support available
 - statutory and voluntary sector agencies must work together to provide co-ordinated support and accommodation for homeless street-based prostitutes
 - projects and funding bodies must ensure high staff-to-client levels and access to external agencies for specialist support
 - to better reflect the difficulty and complexity of work with this client group, outcomes monitoring should be developed for existing and future projects. It should recognise two types of outcomes:
 - i) outputs, such as numbers of women resettled or completing drug treatment programmes
 - ii) intermediate outcomes, such as women continuing their contact with support services and remaining in accommodation.
- This data could complement information collected by local authorities' Supporting People teams, giving this client group better recognition in homelessness and Supporting People strategies
- further research into the housing and support needs of street-based sex workers should aim to gain a fuller picture of the scale of problem, the impact of projects, and potential solutions.

Bad housing wrecks lives

Registered charity number 263710
AUGHS609

We are the fourth richest country in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their homes altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

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We help 100,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of Britain's housing crisis by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

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Shelter Review summary Off the streets: tackling homelessness among female sex workers

Summary

Accommodating the homeless women who work on the streets as prostitutes is an essential first step to addressing their social problems.

Street-based sex workers currently form one of the most excluded and marginalised groups of homeless people. There is little specialist accommodation available to meet their needs, and service providers and funding bodies often fail to recognise the nature and scale of the problem in their area.

While society may see prostitution as these women's biggest problem, the women themselves relate it to their homelessness, drug use, and lifestyles characterised by poverty, chaos, and desperate choices.

This review, by Shelter's Street Homeless Project, is based on four innovative projects that voluntary and statutory agencies may be able to replicate in other areas.

The three agencies involved are:

- **St Mungo's in Lambeth**
- **Alabaré in Bristol**
- **Safe in Birmingham.**

It is supported by wider consultation with sex work projects in England.

The review highlights the need for a range of supported accommodation options for female street-based sex workers who are homeless, and it shows how partnerships between specialist agencies and mainstream service providers can meet their complex needs.

To purchase a copy of the review for £6.75 including postage, please call the credit card hotline on 020 7505 2036 or visit the online bookshop at <http://www.shelter.org.uk/publications> from December.

Ten key findings from the review

1. Specialist agencies say they are encountering **unprecedented numbers** of women who are homeless and engaged in street-based sex work, most having regular contact with between 200 and 300 women in their area.
2. These women are effectively **sleeping on the streets** – in cars, parks, building stairwells, crack houses, and on friends' floors – but are generally not engaged in programmes set up to assist street homeless people.
3. **Stable housing** is regarded as a key factor in enabling women to successfully complete drug treatment and/or exit prostitution.
4. Street prostitution is associated with **social problems** such as drug addiction, multiple deprivation, social exclusion, poverty, and difficult family backgrounds.
5. There is a lack of **appropriate accommodation** – temporary and permanent – for street homeless women who continue to be involved in sex work, or those women trying to exit prostitution.
6. There are very **few tenancy support services** for women with a history of street-based sex work, who have gained accommodation but are struggling to keep it.
7. Hostels and domestic violence refuges often exclude sex workers because of their **complex support needs**. Their lifestyles are often incompatible with living in a hostel.
8. **Law enforcement** of street-based sex work can make it more difficult for women to access projects that help them exit prostitution.
9. A **welfare-based approach** addresses issues such as homelessness and drug use, while helping women to move away from prostitution.
10. Street homelessness has **dire consequences** for female sex workers. These women face serious health problems, early mortality, violence, rape, and mental illness.



The following projects provide models of innovative practice.

(Operational aspects are covered in greater detail in the full review.)

Direct-access accommodation: St Mungo's Cedars Road Hostel, Lambeth

St Mungo's Housing Association in London, in partnership with agencies in Lambeth, is addressing the immediate need for providing street-based sex workers with a roof over their heads. The charity has allocated 10 beds within a large direct-access hostel specifically for homeless, drug-dependent female sex workers.

Project features

- Clients receive intensive support to address their drug use.
- Specialist services, including mental health and resettlement support, are available.
- Admission and care packages are overseen by a specialist manager.
- Sex workers in the area are keen to access the hostel and its services.
- Most clients are positively engaged with programmes during their stay.

The St Mungo's partnership demonstrates that direct-access accommodation can be managed in such a way as to make it a suitable option for drug-dependent sex workers.

Supported housing scheme: St Mungo's Streatham Women's Project, Lambeth

St Mungo's Housing Association's 15-bed supported housing scheme in Tulse Hill aims to meet the need for transitional accommodation, where sex workers can progress towards more independent living. The Streatham Women's Project offers 24-hour staffed accommodation in a large shared house.

Project features

- A harm-minimisation approach to assist sex workers.
- A substance use worker and mental health worker are on staff.
- A specialist manager oversees the women's clinical care needs.
- The project strives to link residents with relevant outside agencies.

The project demonstrates it is possible to provide a secure and stable living environment to meet the medium-term needs of drug-dependent sex workers, greatly improving their quality of life.

Resettlement and tenancy sustainment: Safe in Birmingham

Safe, a sex work project hosted by the Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust, works with Birmingham City Council Housing Department to facilitate effective re-housing of particularly vulnerable women.

Project features

- Women who have stabilised their drug use receive help submitting housing applications.
- Safe provides a point of contact for tenancy offers and arranging viewings.
- Floating support is provided to clients once they gain a tenancy.
- Nearly all the women in the programme have sustained their tenancies.

This approach ensures that women who are traditionally excluded from statutory re-housing have access to the system. It has been very successful and, over a recent nine-month period, the project has secured 29 offers of accommodation for its clients.

Accommodation for exiting women: Alabaré's The Well, Bristol

Alabaré, a charity operating social care services in the south-west of England, runs a 5-bed shared house offering supported accommodation to women who are seeking to exit prostitution and end their drug use.

Project features

- Alcohol and drug use is prohibited (but women on methadone programmes are accepted).
- The project has intensive, 24-hour staffing.
- Clients are given a structured programme of activities.
- Support, including relapse prevention, is available from outside services.

The Well suits women with a high motivation to stay away from substance misuse. It is a measure of the project's success that the majority of clients admitted since opening are either still residents or have successfully moved on to other accommodation.

Shelter's Street Homeless Project

Shelter's Street Homeless Project has produced *Off the streets: tackling homelessness among female sex workers* and this summary.

We aim to raise awareness of street homelessness, influence local and national policy, promote innovation and good practice, and help agencies and local authorities develop solutions to the continuing problems of street homelessness.

We can provide information, advice, and help with:

Needs assessment

Most authorities, and some agencies, will be interested in conducting counts to assess the scale of rough sleeping in their area. We offer the guidance and help to ensure counts are as thorough as possible, and we can help with other methods of assessing need.

Multi-agency partnership working

Many street homeless people have complex needs requiring multi-agency involvement, but successful multi-agency working can be hard to achieve. We promote different models that overcome the barriers, can provide a toolkit on assessment panels, and offer guidance on one-stop drop in initiatives.

Accommodation and support services

Successful solutions to street homelessness require radical thinking. We can provide the advice and guidance about support and housing for street homeless people that can end their homelessness for good. Our models of innovative practice include intensive floating support for 'difficult' clients, and targeted first-step accommodation for entrenched rough sleepers.

For further information about the continuing problem of street homelessness, and how to provide lasting solutions, contact Jon Davis on 0113 245 5142 or email jon_davis@shelter.org.uk.

