

HUNDREDS OF SEX WORKERS CRIMINALISED DESPITE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDING DECRIMINALISATION

PRESS RELEASE

Monday 10 July 2017

A survey by the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) shows that raids, arrests and prosecutions of sex workers is continuing despite a Home Affairs Committee [report \(July 2016\)](#) which recommended a change in the law “so that soliciting is no longer an offence and so that brothel-keeping provisions allow sex workers to share premises”.

Spokeswoman Laura Watson explained:

“Women in our network around the UK send us reports about raids and arrests they have either experienced themselves or seen reported in the local press. For two years we have been compiling this information and publicising it so that sex workers know what is happening in their area. The majority of prosecutions are of women working consensually together with others on the street or in premises.”

During [January to April 2017](#) the ECP received reports of:

- **7 areas where there were organised police crackdowns:** Birmingham, Coventry, Doncaster, High Wycombe, London (Leyton), Newquay and Pill.
- **11 reports of civil orders** being issued. Civil orders, such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Criminal Behaviour Orders, community protection notices, Public Spaces Protection Orders and dispersal notices rely on police discretion and hearsay evidence and require a lower standard of proof. Yet breach of a civil order is a criminal offence and can carry a hefty fine and even a prison sentence. One woman from Swindon went to prison for breaching an ASBO.
- **3 men arrested for kerb-crawling** despite evidence that shows that the criminalisation of clients undermines sex workers safety.
- **1 woman was given a “prostitute caution”.** “Prostitute cautions” can be imposed without any admission of guilt and cannot be appealed. Like other cautions they remain on a person’s record until they are 100 years of age.
- **14 arrests/prosecutions for brothel-keeping.** Brothel-keeping law makes it illegal for two or more sex workers to work together. Landlords, security guards, employers and friends are convicted of “causing, inciting and controlling prostitution for gain” even though they weren’t forcing anyone to work.
- **5 “Closure orders” issued.** Like other civil orders these rely on police discretion – an invitation to corruption. Police only have to “believe” that certain offences are being committed or “will be committed” to close premises. The occupants must, within 48 hours, go to court to defend themselves against the closure. Few people can get legal representation in this time.

- **1 report of fines imposed under proceeds of crime laws.** These laws are draconian and give the police powers to freeze and confiscate people's assets and income, even before a conviction. The police and the Crown Prosecution Service keep a percentage of any profit, corrupting priorities and fuelling raids.
- **3 people arrested for immigration offences.** Migrant women are disproportionately targeted by police for arrest and raids.

One [case](#) that is coming to court on 25 July is of a 70 year old woman who is facing trial for brothel-keeping. She worked as a cleaner and was not involved in running the premises. She only came to the police attention because she went to the aid of a client who collapsed. In other cases, letters are delivered to premises saying: "police officers will conduct a further visit to these premises . . . any female at this address now who is found at the same address in the future is **VERY LIKELY** to be arrested."

A similar number of arrests and prosecutions were seen during [October to December 2016](#). The ECP survey records: police crackdowns in seven areas, 22 people were arrested or charged for brothel-keeping, Redbridge council alone closed 50 alleged brothels, four people arrested for immigration offences and two civil orders used.

During [January to April 2016](#) the following incidents were reported to the ECP: 27 Closure orders issued; 30 arrests or prosecutions for brothel-keeping; 28 people arrested or prosecuted for "carding" (putting up sex workers adverts); police crackdowns in three areas including in Greater Manchester where 24 arrests were made in one week and Luton where 48 vehicles were stopped and 34 sex workers moved on (to more isolated and dangerous areas no doubt).

Ms Watson continues:

"At a time when unemployment, benefit cuts and sanctions, lowering wages, increased homelessness, and debt are forcing more women, particularly mothers, into prostitution, it is unacceptable for the police to be focussed on criminalising women. Members of Parliament should take action to end austerity which has [disproportionately impacted on women](#) and back the Home Affairs Committee [recommendations](#) to ensure that the police prioritise sex workers' safety and protection."

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Notes to Editors:

The English Collective of Prostitutes is a self-help organisation of sex workers, working both on the street and in premises, with a national network throughout the UK. We campaign for the decriminalisation of prostitution, for sex workers' rights and safety, and for resources to enable people to get out of prostitution if they want to.

For more information on prostitution please see ECP [Press Briefing](#).