



Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
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Police and Crime Commissioner:
Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer:

Matt Storey
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22nd October 2024

Via email: jess.phillips.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mrs Phillips,

I am writing to pledge my support for the 'Proceed without Caution' campaign being led by the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), which focuses on the detrimental impact of criminal convictions on the lives of sex workers.

I would urge the government to look at ensuring that historical convictions for sex work are exempt from being disclosed through DBS and other security checks, to ensure that women who have been exploited into sex work, or who have turned to this area of work in order to financially support themselves and their families, especially in such a time of financial hardship, are not then criminalised for the rest of their lives and prevented from moving on into other forms of employment.

The Proceed without Caution report highlights the difficulties women have faced leaving sex work and moving into alternative forms of employment. As you will be aware sex workers are more likely to be women, and as highlighted by the House of Commons Research briefing, Women and the UK Economy, many jobs which are more likely to be done by women are also jobs that require DBS checks, eg. carers, childminders, social workers, nurses.

Over two-thirds of the women interviewed for the ECP report said that a sex work related conviction had been the reason they found it hard to leave sex work and find another job. Women described how having a record for sex work meant that they didn't apply for jobs for fear that the conviction would come up. They spoke about being prevented from applying for or accepting promotions or moving into other areas of work. Women felt that they had been locked in low waged jobs and were wary of their workmates finding out about their criminal convictions and this affected their relationships with them. Overall, women felt that their possibilities were thwarted by the burden of a criminal record.

I have seen evidence of this first hand in my previous role as a case worker for the local MP when I dealt with a former sex worker who was struggling to find employment due to a historic conviction received many years previously which continued to impact her life negatively.



The Police & Crime Commissioner for Cleveland is an accredited Living Wage Employer with the Living Wage Foundation.

I represent an area of high deprivation, and during my time as Police and Crime Commissioner I have already noted the links between deprivation and criminality, with organised crime groups focusing on exploiting those who live in deprived areas by offering them 'employment' opportunities that they may be struggling to find through other mechanisms. It is well known that sustainable employment is a key factor in reducing offending which makes it even more unjust that women in Cleveland and across the country are being prevented from moving into numerous forms of employment due to their previous involvement in sex work.

As Police and Crime Commissioner I am heavily involved in the work which the North East Sex Work Forum are leading to develop a Cleveland wide Sex Work Harm Reduction Strategy which aims to:

- Support the sex work community to be safer and healthier aligned to a robust harm reduction framework
- Inform and influence regional policy regarding inclusion, diversity, access to justice and so improve safety
- Strengthen partnerships and relevant information sharing as part of a joined up cohesive approach to the adult entertainment/sex industry across Cleveland

Through Safer Streets funding we have also been able to support a police operation focusing on a harm reduction approach to sex work in a targeted area, and I am pleased to say that locally in Cleveland our officers take a safeguarding approach to sex work rather than focusing on criminalisation.

However, I am still aware there will be many women in our local area who have historic convictions for sex work and, whilst I recognise that sex work is a choice for a minority, others may be being forced to stay in the industry due to the fact that their convictions prevent them from seeking alternative employment.

As a society we have moved a long way forwards in treating sex workers with the dignity and respect that they deserve, therefore I would urge the government to ensure that legislation around DBS checks also takes this step forwards and that sex work convictions are made exempt from disclosure.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Matt Storey

Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland