

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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**24 January 2017
AQW/9149/16-21, AQW/9150/16-21
AQW/9151/16-21, AQW/9152/16-21**

Paul Frew (North Antrim) has asked:

AQW/9149/16-21

To ask the Minister of Justice how many sex worker representatives now sit on the Sex Workers Liaison Group and to outline (i) whether this has increased since its inception; and (ii) any new members, and whether they are additional or replacement.

AQW/9150/16-21

To ask the Minister of Justice for her assessment on (i) sitting members of the Sex Workers Liaison Group currently challenging human exploitation /trafficking legislation in the high court; and (ii) whether this is a conflict of interest.

AQW/9151/16-21

To ask the Minister of Justice to detail how many sex workers were supported through the Sex Workers Liaison Group, since its inception.

AQW/9152/16-21

To ask the Minister of Justice to detail how many sex workers have been rescued through the Sex Workers Liaison Group, since its inception.

ANSWER

Two sex worker representatives sit on the Sex Workers Liaison Group. The Group's membership has not been reviewed, nor any new members added since it was established in November 2015. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Group which includes Membership details can be found at the OCTF website (www.octf.gov.uk/Publications).

I do not assess that any conflict of interest arises as a result of the judicial review of section 15 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 that is being taken by members of the Sex Workers Liaison Group. As the ToR make clear, the purpose of the Group is to improve the engagement between my Department and organisations representing or working with sex workers in order to assist in the overall strategy to raise awareness of human trafficking and thereby help to identify and rescue potential victims. The Group exists therefore to tackle human trafficking within the sex industry. It does not have any functions in respect of policy development on wider issues relating to the sale of sexual services.

The focus of the Group is on raising awareness of human trafficking, providing information on signs and indicators and encouraging reporting of suspicions to the PSNI. Whilst it aims to improve the identification of victims of human trafficking within the sex industry, the Group has no role in providing support to sex workers or to any victims who are recovered.

The PSNI has confirmed that a number of proactive human trafficking investigations have been commenced as a direct result of engagement of this

nature. However, due to the confidentiality of information and the nature of the investigations themselves it would be inappropriate to discuss the engagement or the investigations that have been commenced.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Sugden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

CLAIRE SUGDEN MLA

BACKGROUND:

- The Human Trafficking Engagement Group was set up in December 2012. Its initial aim was to formalise and improve the engagement between the DOJ, PSNI, Health and Social Services, other relevant statutory bodies, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), on the issue of human trafficking.
- Following a 2015 review of membership it was agreed that a separate group to engage with sex workers and with organisations that provide support to them could assist in the overall strategy to raise awareness and to identify and reach victims of trafficking. 31,
- The Group is chaired by DOJ officials and membership includes representation from:
 - DOJ;
 - UglyMugs.ie;
 - Sex Workers' Alliance Ireland;
 - Belfast Commercial Sex Workers' project (a Belfast Health and Social Care Trust initiative providing assistance to sex workers);
and
 - PSNI.

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Most recently, Paul Frew, as the Chairperson of the Justice Committee, questioned the establishment of the Group when officials updated the Committee on progress against the 2015-16 NI Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy in September 2016.

- At that time officials reiterated that the Group exists to facilitate engagement with people within the sex industry, to raise awareness of trafficking and to encourage suspicions to be reported to the PSNI. The Committee was also told of an education awareness session by DOJ and PSNI with sex workers that was hosted by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Feedback for this event was very positive with a number of sex workers indicating that they would be more likely in future to report concerns to PSNI.

- The terms of reference make clear that the role of the group is in relation to tackling human trafficking. Its functions do not extend to wider policy issues relating to prostitution. Specifically the role of the Group is to:
 - explore methods of working together to tackle human trafficking for sexual exploitation;
 - assist in the development of resources to improve identification of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation;
 - inform development of human trafficking policy, programmes and strategies; and
 - provide an arena for the exchange of information and ideas.

- The membership and purpose of the Group have not changed in any way since its inception in November 2015. The terms of reference for the Group and minutes of the two meetings, November 2015 and February 2016, are published on the OCTF website.
- The PSNI have participated and will continue to participate in the sex worker liaison group. PSNI has confirmed that a number of proactive Human Trafficking Investigations have been commenced as a direct result of engagement of this nature. However, due to the confidentiality of information and the nature of the investigations themselves it would be inappropriate to discuss the specifics of the engagement or the investigations that have been commenced by the PSNI.
- The Group does not have any functions in respect of supporting sex workers or victims of human trafficking. Alternative arrangements are in place to support victims of trafficking under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which places a statutory duty on the Department of Justice to provide assistance and support to adult potential victims.

Drafted by:

Date: 11/01/17

Cleared by: Julie Wilson

Date: 12/01/17

cc list: Anthony Harbinson
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