

Women's Exploitation and Safety Panel (WESP)

Operating Protocol

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1. Introduction

Women's Exploitation and Safety Panel (WESP) is a multi-agency group convened by Beyond the Streets to hold MARAC-style case management meetings where professionals from each agency can share information about street-based individuals involved in selling sex as well as women who are selling sex off-street to support their basic needs. The aim of the case management meeting is to tackle the harm faced by individuals involved in selling sex by addressing their safety, providing a holistic support package and risk management plan. This is alongside a long-term view of enabling those affected, and who choose to safely exit prostitution.

Beyond the Streets, commissioned to deliver the Women's Exploitation and Safety Panel (WESP), will co-ordinate these meetings.

2. Aims

The aims of the Women's Exploitation and Safety Panel (WESP) case management meetings are to:

- Share information in a multi-agency forum with a view to increasing the safety and wellbeing of individuals involved in selling sex, including their children where applicable
- Create a holistic support package that aims to increase their safety and decrease their support needs and which contributes towards their safe exit from selling sex
- Improve individual agency accountability
- Reduce repeat victimisation
- Reduce repeat police involvement
- Improve support for frontline workers working with individuals involved in selling sex
- Promote the sharing of specialist knowledge and good practice.

3. Membership of the WESP

Each agency must ensure that they have at least one representative able to attend the meeting. As such, a Lead Member and a Secondary Member should be identified in the event that the Lead Member is unable to attend.

The Lead Member should be at a level so as to be able to make decisions for their agency at the meeting and will be expected to understand the dynamics of prostitution as well as recognition of prostitution as a form of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

4. Members' Responsibilities

The members of the group are expected to fulfil the following responsibilities:

- Attend meetings on a monthly basis (11 times per annum)

- Act as the main point of contact for their agency including providing additional information for the WESP meetings
- Encourage their agency to make relevant referrals to the WESP where they are working on cases of high-risk individuals involved in selling sex
- Undertaking all agreed actions requested by the Chair of the WESP meeting
- Ensure that cases are given the relevant 'flagged' priority on their own case management systems as well as ensuring all actions from the meeting are followed up
- Communicating all actions from the meeting to their agency to ensure that the actions are followed up in a timely fashion
- Appoint a Secondary Member in the event they are unable to attend the monthly meeting.

5. Attendance by other professionals

Other agencies or professionals may be invited to attend the multi-agency meeting if they are involved in a specific case due for discussion. Any such invitations must be agreed by Beyond the Streets in advance of the meeting. Invitations will be to participate in discussions of a specific case, not to attend the whole meeting. Observers to the meeting are to be agreed by Beyond the Streets. All persons at the meeting will be asked to read and sign the attendance list and confidentiality agreement. This is to ensure those attending agree and abide to the multi-agency information sharing principles.

6. Attendance by those referred and/or their Families

Due to the nature of the discussions at the WESP, those referred and family members or other interested parties will not be invited to attend. They may however make their concerns known to the WESP via the referring agency or their advocate or by writing to Beyond the Streets.

7. Referral Criteria for the WESP

To be discussed at the WESP meetings the individual must be currently involved in selling sex in the borough and be over the age of 18. This could be selling on-street, or off-street but within the context of Survival Sex. Beyond the Streets define Survival Sex as '*selling or exchanging sex for food, shelter, drugs or alcohol, to pay bills or safety*'. It is when someone feels that selling sex is their only option to ensure they can meet their and/or their family's basic needs.

They must be assessed as being high risk according to the red flag vulnerabilities outlined in the WESP Referral Form and in need of a holistic, multi-agency response to reduce and harm to them or to their children.

There are currently two criteria, one of which must be met for the case to be referred to the WESP:

Professional Judgement

If a professional has serious concerns about a situation, they should refer the case to the WESP. There will be occasions where the particular context of a case gives rise to serious concerns even if the individual concerned has been unable to disclose the information that might highlight their risk

more clearly. This could reflect extreme levels of fear, cultural barriers particularly in cases of so-called 'honour' based violence. This judgement would be based on the experience of the professional and/or individual's perception of the risk faced.

Escalation

If there has been a marked increase in the number of police callouts/arrests in the past 12 months or if a number of referrals into the court diversion scheme have been imposed and the individual has not attended compulsory meetings, the individual affected should be referred to the THPP.

8. Referral to the WESP Meeting

Any member of the WESP may refer a case to the meeting by completing the referral form, consent form (or 'without consent' form) and providing details to Beyond the Streets for inclusion at the next meeting.

All referrals must be submitted by completing the referral form in its entirety. Incomplete forms will be returned for further details.

The deadline for receipt of referrals will be 3 working days before the next meeting unless there are exceptional circumstances – in extremely high-risk cases.

Meeting dates will be provided by Beyond the Streets for the next 11 months.

Where possible, referrals should be discussed with the individual to gain their consent before the meeting in line with the WESP Information Sharing Agreement and legislation. However, referrals can still be made without consent by completing the appropriate 'Without Consent' form with justification as to why consent could not be obtained.

9. Re-referrals to the WESP

All cases that have previously been discussed at the WESP may be re-referred for subsequent discussion where there has been a noted escalation in risk to the individual or to their children since the last meeting.

10. The Meeting

The Partnership meeting will be held monthly (11 times per year) at a venue, date and time agreed by all members. Beyond the Streets will host the meeting and contact you the week prior to the meeting to share an agenda, as well as confirming the location, date and time.

11. Emergency WESP Meetings

Emergency WESP meetings will be extraordinary meetings called only when an individual is deemed at such high risk that the case cannot wait for the next monthly meeting, recognising that statutory

agencies have a duty of care to safeguard that person by acting immediately. Emergency meetings will not always need to take place face-to-face but agencies must be aware that they may be contacted to attend an emergency meeting should the need arise.

12. Safeguarding Children

Where children are at potential risk of harm which is identified in a referral, the WESP Procedures **do not** take precedent over the Tower Hamlet's Safeguarding Children Board Procedures.

Where there are any safeguarding concerns with respect to any child, referrals should be made immediately to Tower Hamlets Children and Families Social Care. This should be done in conjunction with Tower Hamlets' Safeguarding Procedures.

13. Safeguarding Adults

The WESP may also consider cases where the individual is deemed to be a 'vulnerable adult'. In Tower Hamlets a vulnerable adult is defined as 'a person aged 18 years or over who may be unable to take care of themselves, or protect themselves from harm or from being exploited. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a disability, a sensory impairment, are old and frail, or have some form of illness.' (Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Adults Information Sharing Protocol, May 2010: Paragraph 8).

Where a vulnerable adult has been referred, contact should be made with the Safeguarding Adults team and where a vulnerable adult who is involved in selling sex is identified by Safeguarding Adults Team, they should make the case known to Beyond the Streets for advice on whether to make a referral to the WESP.

There are some cases where it may not be possible for a vulnerable adult to give consent to their referral to the THPP meeting. In this case the 'Information Sharing without Consent Form' should be completed and submitted with the referral form. The 'Information Sharing without Consent' form includes a list of legal & safeguarding grounds to refer without consent- one or more of which you should select to justify your referral without consent.

14. Administration

Information will be circulated to members of the Partnership and any additional involved agencies in advance of the meetings (no less than 3 working days).

Beyond the Streets will compile and distribute minutes and an action log at the end of each meeting which will contain information on actions to be taken by relevant agencies as agreed at the meeting. The Partnership members will inform Beyond the Streets on wesp@beyondthestreets.org.uk when their actions have been completed.

15. Information Sharing Protocol

All member agencies of the WESP are required to sign-up to the Information Sharing Protocol.

16. Confidentiality

- All information in relation to the Partnership is strictly confidential. No documents relating to the meeting are to be circulated or shared with non-members without the written agreement of Beyond the Streets.
- All correspondence relating to the Partnership will be sent by secure email and clearly marked “STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL”. Members will ensure that all papers are stored and disposed of securely, restricting unauthorised access.
- Agencies will be provided with hard copies of the WESP agenda and minutes at the meeting.

17. Breaches of Security

Any breach of security may pose a serious risk to the subject of the information and also to the agency or professional involved in the case. Any breach of security must be notified immediately to Beyond the Streets and individual disciplinary policies must be followed.

18. Equality

It is important that the WESP meets the needs of all high-risk individuals, including those from minority communities. To ensure we are discussing cases which reflect our local population and have agency representation who can offer specialist advice we will produce quarterly monitoring reports outlining the ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability and gender of individuals discussed at the meeting.

The membership of the WESP will be regularly reviewed, in order to identify any additional representatives required to meet the needs of the local community (including diverse communities).

19. Governance

A WESP Steering Group will be established and will meet twice a year. The Steering Group will be responsible for taking the strategic lead by addressing the practical and resource implications of the WESP and develop and maintain internal protocols and procedures in relation to public protection.

It is the responsibility of the Steering Group to report to the strategic partnership, the Community Safety Partnership.

20. Review of this information

This Operating Protocol will be reviewed every 12 months.

21. Complaints' Procedure

Any complaints against another signatory agency about their WESP activities should be emailed to Beyond the Streets on wesp@beyondthestreets.org.uk

22. Withdrawing from the Partnership

Any individual or agency who wishes to withdraw from the Partnership must do so in writing to Beyond the Streets at wesp@beyondthestreets.org.uk giving 2 months' notice.