

## ***Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill* – call for written evidence on Stage 2 amendments**

Engender welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee on legislative amendments to the *Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill* as lodged for Stage 2 consideration. We can confirm that we are in support of the following proposed amendments:

- **New offences relating to stalking**
- **Sentencing for knife crime**

We are also very much in support of Trish Godman's amendment (8) and would like in particular would to comment in relation to the **Offence of engaging in paid-for sexual activity (and related new offences)**.

Engender takes a clear stance on prostitution which we believe is part of the spectrum of men's violence against women. As an organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda to make Scotland a fairer, safer place where women can flourish and contribute to both the social and market economies with dignity, freedom and justice, we have long been committed to raising awareness of the harm caused through prostitution. In line with amendment 8 we hold that it is vitally important to put the focus firmly on those who purchase sex, who create the demand, and who have in the past been invisible from public debate.

At Engender we believe that legislation must go further and that amendment 8 on the **Offence of engaging in paid-for sexual activity (and related new offences)** will go a long way in sending an unequivocal message that buying sex will not be tolerated.

During one of our recent 'Inspiring Women' discussion sessions at Engender our members were in agreement that the women involved in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation will *always* be there as long as a demand and a market for prostitution exists. In order to change this we need to make a fundamental change, similar to that which has happened with domestic abuse and around sexual assault... 15 years ago these were seen as private matters but we now have a wider recognition that they are very much public and social issues. Our members are keen to have the same kind of cultural and attitudinal change happen in relation to prostitution.

At Engender we are in no doubt that prostitution is inherently harmful to those involved and also upon our wider culture. The harm that commercial sexual exploitation causes to all women, by sanctioning the objectification of women's bodies, happens regardless of whether the paid-for sexual activity is 'coerced' and for this reason Engender does not support amendments 8A-D lodged by Margo Macdonald or amendment 461 lodged by Nigel Don.

We wholeheartedly endorse the work carried out by our sister organisations which include 'Rape Crisis Scotland', 'Scottish Women's Aid', the 'Women's Support Project' and 'Zero Tolerance' and we recognise and value their respective roles in shining a light on this form of oppression and exploitation of women. For us, the proposed amendments present an effective means of challenging demand for prostitution although this in itself should not be viewed as a 'stand alone' measure. Consideration must also be given to supplementary interventions such as:

- The decriminalisation of those who are purchased for sexual activity
- Appropriate and adequate resources being available to support women wishing to exit prostitution.

If you require any further information please contact our Projects Director on 0131 558 9596 or email [Carol.Flack@engender.org.uk](mailto:Carol.Flack@engender.org.uk)