

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 56

Subject: Petition for Debate

Date of meeting: 19 December 2024

Report of: Corporate Director for Corporate Services

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Ward(s) affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Under the Council's Petition Scheme if a petition contains more than 1,250 signatures and is not petition requesting officer evidence, it will be debated by the Full Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the petition is noted.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 To receive the following petition signed by 1563 people at time of publication:

Decriminalise Sex Work and Prioritise Safety

Prostitution in the UK is increasing because poverty is increasing due to deliberate government policies of austerity cuts and the cost-of-living increase. Most sex workers are mothers working to support families.

UK law makes it illegal for sex workers to work together. This forces sex workers to make a choice: to keep themselves safe and face the possibility of arrest, or avoid a criminal record and put themselves in danger.

Criminalisation of sex work undermines safety by forcing sex workers to work in isolation and deterring them from reporting violence and exploitation for fear of arrest.

Migrant women, disabled women, trans women and women of colour disproportionately experience violence and are overly criminalised.

Prostitution could be reduced by providing viable economic alternatives and affordable housing, free childcare, living wage benefits, a universal guaranteed income, and pay equity.

New Zealand has successfully decriminalised prostitution with verifiable improvements in sex workers' safety, health and well-being.

Decriminalisation is supported by prestigious organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Women Against Rape in the UK and internationally, Amnesty International, the World Health Organization, Human Rights Watch, UNAIDS, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women.

We the undersigned demand that Brighton and Hove City Council (and its partner organisations*):

1. Issue a statement in support of local sex workers and for the decriminalisation of sex work to improve sex workers' health, safety and welfare.
2. Provide additional resources to sex workers to enable people to more easily leave sex work if they choose, including priority for council housing and cash payments for destitute sex workers and those with No Recourse to Public Funds.
3. Explore all possible actions the council could take to support current sex workers, looking into what other local authorities have done, and exploring all legal powers the council has to take steps towards decriminalisation on a local level.
4. Write to the relevant Secretaries of State calling on them to:
 - a. Implement the Home Affairs Committee (2016) recommendation that sex workers working on the street and together in premises be decriminalised and criminal records expunged;
 - b. Implement an amnesty from arrest and deportation for sex workers reporting violence;
 - c. End current government policies which are proven to increase children and mothers' poverty, specifically benefit sanctions, the two-child limit and the bedroom tax;
 - d. Explore how the government can help those who wish to leave sex work by providing viable and stable economic alternatives.

4. PROCEDURE:

- 4.1 The petition will be debated at the Council meeting in accordance with the agreed protocol:
 - (i) The Lead petitioner will be invited by the Mayor to present the petition and will have up to 3 minutes in which to outline the petition and confirm the number of signatures;
 - (ii) The Mayor will then open the matter up for debate by councillors for period of 15 minutes and will first call on the relevant Cabinet Member to respond to the petition and move a proposed response. The Mayor will then call on those councillors who

have indicated a desire to speak in the matter, before calling on the relevant Cabinet Member to respond to the debate;

- (iii) An amendment to the recommendation in paragraph 2.1 of the report or to add additional recommendations should be submitted by 10.00am on the day before the meeting; otherwise it will be subject to the Mayor's discretion as to being appropriate. Any such amendment will need to be formally moved and seconded at the meeting;
- (iv) After the 15 minutes set aside for the debate, the Mayor will then formally put:
- (v) (a) Any amendments in the order in which they are moved, and
(b) The substantive recommendation(s) as amended (if amended).

