

Scottish Government/Police Scotland collaborative working – delivering Operation Begonia

Part of the national approach to challenging demand for prostitution & supporting those with experience of it.



Scotland's strategic approach
to challenging and deterring
men's demand for prostitution
and supporting the recovery
and sustainable exit of those
involved in prostitution

February 2024



Policy Context

- In 2024 Scottish Government published a Strategic Approach to challenging and deterring demand for prostitution and improving support for those with experience of it.
- It outlines the next steps the SG will take, working across government and with stakeholders to implement it. This includes our work with Police Scotland.
- This approach is also reflected within Police Scotland's VAWG Strategy, published in 2023 :



‘Our officers and staff will be trained to understand the impact and trauma experienced by women involved in CSE. We will continue to develop a consistent and trauma-informed approach to engaging with women affected by CSE to encourage the reporting of violence and ensure victims feel safe, respected and supported throughout the justice process. We will assist our partners and representative organisations to develop support mechanisms for victims, establish routes to escape this type of violence and access justice, and challenge the origin of exploitation’.



Policy Principles

We have also published policy principles to help guide relevant policy development and service design, across government and the wider public sector to help guide greater policy cohesion.

**National
Approach**

**Victims of
exploitation,
not criminals**

**Promote social
inclusion and
address stigma**

**Preventative
approach**

**Supporting
recovery and
sustainable
exit**

**Learning from
lived
experience**

Policy Context

Throughout stakeholder engagement last year, on how we improve support, a key theme was that stakeholders wanted an approach that had a key focus on challenging demand- this feedback has guided our approach.

In October 2024, the Minister for Victims & Community Safety announced a package of work with Police Scotland, which includes:

- ▣ A secondment from the SG Violence against Women and Girls team (commenced December 2024) to help support the development and implementation of a national and strategic approach to policing across Scotland - supporting the further development of Operation Begonia. Includes funding for Begonia patrols.
- ▣ Developing local networks to support Begonia.
- ▣ Funding Police Scotland to gather intelligence to understand the full extent of demand for CSE across Scotland (including online), helping to better reach victims and strengthen the response to tackling perpetrators.
- ▣ Our work will also consider the future training needs for Police Scotland and partners.

This developing network between Justice and wider mainstream and specialist services will aim to pave the way for the development of a wider support pathway/ hub approach for women with experience of CSE.

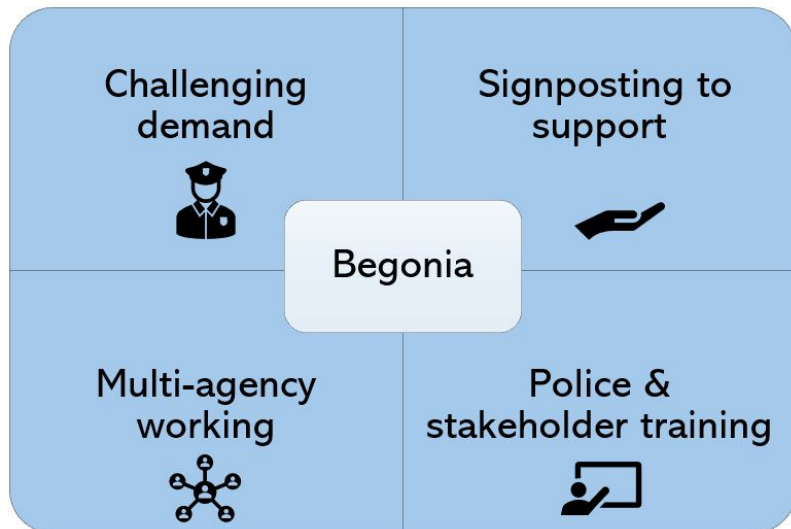
CSE in Scotland

The following activities are illegal:

- running a brothel
- soliciting or loitering in a public place for the purpose of purchasing sex (purchasers/kerb crawlers)
- trafficking people for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- persuade/cause or attempt to persuade/cause an individual into prostitution.
- trafficking persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation

Human Trafficking is the action of recruiting, transporting/transferring, harbouring or receiving or exchanging or transferring control over another person, including children and young people with a view to that person being exploited. Travel is not required for an offence of human trafficking to be committed in Scotland, and it can happen to anyone – including British nationals.

What is the Begonia approach



Begonia is a new trauma-informed approach to prostitution. Officers will patrol areas known for on street prostitution, speaking to people involved in prostitution to make sure they are safe and to signpost them to the support available to them from local partner organisations. These patrols are happening in Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow but the approach will be rolled out nationally.

This will form a key aspect of the Scottish Government's Strategic Approach's implementation and aligns with Police Scotland's VAWG strategy through it:

- Improving support for women with experience of CSE and improving access to Justice- through strengthening connections between police and wider mainstream & specialist services, through the development of local networks to support Begonia.
- Challenging, deterring & disrupting demand- utilising existing powers
- Raising awareness of CSE amongst wider services within the local Begonia networks, supported by regular stakeholder/ police meetings. This helping to better understand how CSE presents across Scotland/ data.
- Through the strengthened local links between police and stakeholders, will help improve support for particularly vulnerable women who may move in and out of support – with opportunities to case conference.
- Ensuring a consistent national approach, supported by training for both police and stakeholders- which will also help improve local intelligence and aim to help from a preventative perspective.

Begonia- current picture



Aberdeen

- Current Begonia Patrols
- Local stakeholder network meeting regularly
- SG funded support includes Aberdeen Cyrenians, who are part of the local Begonia stakeholder network.

Dundee

- Current Begonia Patrols
- A local stakeholder network to support Begonia will be developed this year.
- Local SG CSE funded support includes Dundee WRSAC

Edinburgh

- Local stakeholder network currently being developed
- Local SG CSE funded support includes, Sacro Another Way
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Glasgow

- Current Begonia Patrols
- Local SG CSE funded support includes, Women's Support Project & TARA. Routes Out currently working alongside the police- we will look for opportunities to build on this engagement.

Begonia- next steps

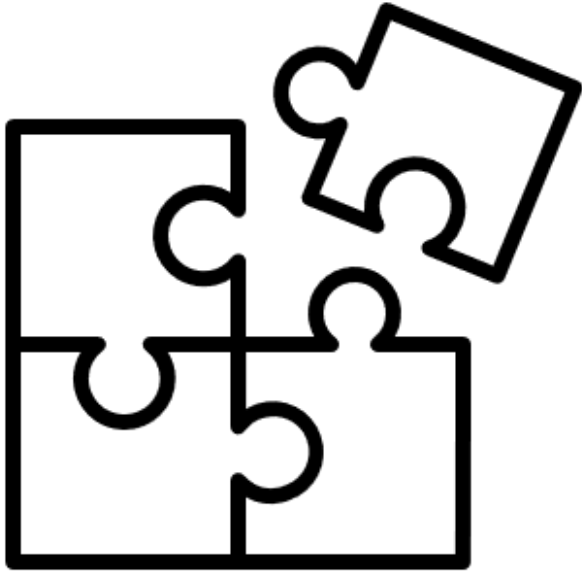
- Further developing local Begonia stakeholder networks.
- Beyond the areas where there are dedicated Begonia patrols the Begonia approach will still form part of Police Scotland's national approach with updated CSE training to support this being rolled out this year – to help ensure a consistent approach beyond the Begonia patrols.
- More broadly, we are also holding a discussion this month for stakeholders to bring together the training/ employability support together for women which we will ensure interlinks to the Begonia networks – this forming part of our considerations around the longer-term support women may need.



Online exploitation

- Vulnerable individuals on ASWs face significant risks of CSE including coercion, HT, debt bondage, physical and psychological harm and lack of control over their situation. Their vulnerability is often exacerbated by factors such as poverty, homelessness, drug use, mental health issues, and past trauma making them susceptible to exploitation by third parties.
- Police Scotland is actively working to reduce these risks by adopting a victim centred approach focused on identifying and safeguarding those being exploited. These efforts include intelligence gathering to disrupt activities or Organised Crime Groups who exploit vulnerable individuals and collaborating with partners such as LA, health services and NGOs to provide support and exit strategies for victims. We also engage in public awareness campaigns to highlight the signs of exploitation and encourage reporting.
- The PS internet page has information regards the support available and provides information about staying safe online: [Internet safety - Police Scotland](#)
- Scottish Government established a stakeholder forum earlier this year bringing together those across the wider public and third sector to harness our efforts in tackling online VAWG – this is looking to improve the information available to practitioners supporting women and girls affected by online/ tech-facilitated VAWG. CSE is within our considerations as part of this work.

Police Scotland & ASP



- All adult protection concerns reported to Police Scotland will be thoroughly investigated. Under the Adult Support and Protection legislation, Police Scotland have a statutory obligation to record and share information concerning Adults at Risk with the relevant Local Authority. Police Scotland will investigate any allegations of criminality towards an Adult at Risk.
- When a Police Officer comes into contact with an individual who they believe to be an Adult at Risk they will ensure that the adult is removed from harm.
- The Police Officer will then ensure the Adults details are recorded, and Social Work are contacted at the time of the incident if required.



Helpful links

- [Prostitution - Police Scotland](#)
- [Human Trafficking - Police Scotland](#)
- [Op Begonia – Police Scotland's new national approach to prostitution - Police Scotland](#)
- [Commercial Sexual Exploitation - Safer.scot](#)
- [Startegic Approach to challenging demand](#)
- [Policy principles](#)