

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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THE FUTURE OF PROSTITUTION IN BRITAIN

Britain will not be getting red-light ‘tolerance zones,’ where prostitution would be allowed to take place legally, in its inner cities. Liverpool City Council will therefore have to abandon its own much-publicised plans for such a zone.

In a published strategy tougher than expected, the Home Office has also promised action to punish and deter kerb-crawlers, and there are to be co-ordinated efforts to address the links between prostitution and wider criminality; prostitution and exploitation; prostitution and drugs; and prostitution and social deprivation. This will involve the police, but also a wide range of social agencies, specialist services and community groups.

Following the public Consultation *Paying the Price* in 2004, the Home Office strategy for tackling the problem of street-level sex trade in England and Wales was announced on 17 January 2006. It consists of four main goals:

- To challenge the view that street prostitution is inevitable and here to stay
- To achieve an overall reduction in street prostitution
- To improve safety and quality of life in communities affected by prostitution
- To reduce all forms of commercial sexual exploitation

It is disappointing that the Strategy document has allowed for the legal activity of ‘mini-brothels’ – two women and a receptionist working together in the same premises for the purposes of prostitution – provided that this is not part of a wider network. This concession amounts, even if on a small scale, to the first-ever legalisation of brothels, and fails to take account of the moral and social evil of prostitution, the vulnerability and welfare of the women involved, and the nuisance to nearby residents.

The effectiveness of the new initiatives will depend on the extent to which the police are willing to bring prosecutions. However there is already significant evidence that the police are cracking down on the sex trade, especially where the ‘trafficking’ of girls from overseas is involved.

In spite of its shortcomings, this response by the government is better than might have been expected. If the will is there, the Strategy offers an opportunity for a serious attempt to deal with street prostitution, and to address the social circumstances which draw young women into it.

Rod Badams

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Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

The Old Bank House, 17 Malpas Road, Newport, South Wales. NP20 5PA
Telephone: 01633 893925
Email: office@affinity.org.uk
Website: www.affinity.org.uk

affinity
gospel churches in partnership