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## **Delegated Officer Report**

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	<b>Rebecca Fletcher, Director of Public Health</b>
<b>Date of Decision:</b>	<b>February 2024</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Request to extend the current collaboration agreement with Rochdale Council for the provision of targeted support for women who sex work by 12 months</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Andrea Entwistle, Senior Business and Commissioning Manager (Public Health)</b>
<b>Ward (s):</b>	<b>Borough wide</b>

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**Reason for the decision:** To ensure that women who sex work and either live or work in Oldham have access to appropriate and accessible support for their sexual health and wellbeing, safety and, where necessary, substance misuse, in order to improve their health and wellbeing.

The purpose of the report is to request approval for a 12-month extension to the collaboration agreement under which Rochdale Council, on behalf of itself and Oldham Council, commissions Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) to provide targeted support for women who sex work and live or work in Oldham or Rochdale with a key aim of improving their health and wellbeing.

The financial contribution from Oldham Council for the 12-month extension will be £42,087 (the total contract value will be £84,174, which will be split equally between Rochdale and Oldham).

**Summary:** The Health and Social Care Act 2012 places responsibility on Local Authorities to commission and fund comprehensive, open-access HIV/STI test services, STI treatment service (excluding HIV treatment) and

contraception services for the benefit of all persons who present in their area. The same act places a duty on local authorities to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of their local population by ensuring that there are public health services aimed at reducing drug and alcohol misuse. Local authorities can choose to commission targeted support services specifically for people who sex work but are not mandated to do so.

Sex workers are one of the most marginalised and stigmatised groups in our society who carry an extremely high burden of unmet health need. They experience multiple and interdependent health and social problems and extreme health inequality. As such, advocacy for the health and safety of sex workers is a public health concern.

Sex workers are a hidden population and prevalence is very difficult to ascertain. However, most recent estimates (based on national estimates and the GM population) suggest that there are 4,565 sex workers in Greater Manchester. This is likely an underestimate due to the concentration of sex work in large cities and areas with high levels of deprivation – Oldham is in the top 20 most deprived local authorities. Whilst the majority of sex workers working in GM are based in Manchester, it is estimated that a significant minority work and live in Oldham and Rochdale. A 2021 survey carried out by Manchester Action on Street Health (a local charity working with sex workers) showed that the majority of women who were interviewed were working in more than one location and many travelled outside of where they lived to undertake sex work – particularly those working on-street and in parlours and saunas. In GM, the majority of sex work (90%) is undertaken by British women aged late 20s to early 40s. The same MASH survey showed the biggest support need that sex workers had was around sexual health.

Sex work is associated with poorer health and wellbeing, and particularly with poor mental ill-health. All women engaging in it seem to experience negative health and wellbeing effects, although experiences and needs vary. The less control women have over their sex work activities, the more adversely their health and wellbeing seem to be affected.

Sexual ill health and poor sexual wellbeing are strongly linked to deprivation and health inequalities and present significant costs to society as well as to the individual. Sex workers are twice as likely as other females to be diagnosed with chlamydia and almost three times more likely to be diagnosed with gonorrhoea. They are also at higher risk of unplanned pregnancy and are often incentivized not to use condoms. Stigma, discrimination, and punitive legal and

social environments are key determinants of increased HIV vulnerability and, as such, sex workers are estimated to be at 30 times greater risk of acquiring HIV than the general female population.

Street sex workers are significantly more likely to experience drug dependency (such as heroin and cocaine). Research has shown this is due to multiple overlapping reasons, with some starting sex work to fund their or their partner's drug habit and some using drugs as a coping mechanism for past and ongoing trauma. For sex workers who also inject drugs, a lack of non-stigmatising needle and syringe exchange and treatment programmes also increases the risk of common HIV comorbidities, such as hepatitis B and C

Women who sex work have a mortality rate that is 12 times the national average for women. Sex work is often unsafe. Homicide is a too common cause of death for sex workers. Most sex workers (63-80%) experience violence at some point and the risk of harm to sex workers appears to be increasing. Sex workers are often more reluctant to report assaults to the police.

Women who sex work are also more likely than average to experience mental ill-health, homelessness, long-term illness or disability, learning difficulty, be victims of crime, and to have experiences within the criminal justice system.

Many sex workers begin sex work because they have financial needs they cannot meet, and long-term financial difficulties keep some women in sex work, especially for survival. The underlying reasons for long-term financial difficulties are complex and personal, and may include ill-health, disability, meeting care costs for someone else who is ill or disabled, immigration status, homelessness, losing a job, inability to get a job, debt, inability to get loans, and/or drug or alcohol use. All these experiences may be compounded by racism or other forms of discrimination.

Faced with these health and social risks, there is a need to protect and support the health and lives of sex workers.

Reducing health inequalities is one of the main strategic aims for Oldham. Supporting vulnerable groups, such as sex workers who lie at the intersection of a broad range of health inequalities, will contribute to a number of key priorities aimed at reducing health inequalities, including:

- Ensuring access to services by disadvantaged communities
- Improving sexual health
- Promoting treatment and recovery from substance misuse

Reducing risks associated with sex work requires an understanding of the social and cultural context in which sex workers live and work. Sex workers are often considered 'hard to reach', but there are specialist organisations that have extensive experience of working with this group. Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) is a charity that provides support to women who sex work, offering a range of confidential and non-judgmental services in order to help keep them safe and healthy. The service supports women who sex work to experience better health, improved wellbeing and safety and helps them to have choices available to them to make positive life changes. MASH ensure that women who sex work are heard, understood and experience less stigma and they also support other agencies to enable them to be better equipped to effectively support and meet women's needs. This includes a MASH Service User Advisory Panel that ensures the services and plans are scrutinised by women with lived experience of sex work and of using the service. MASH is actively trans inclusive and all women are welcome. They support women in all forms of sex work including on-street, indoor (in parlours and saunas) and online.

Manchester Action on Street Health are the specialist provider to support and advocate for women who sex work in Greater Manchester. They initially primarily delivered the service in Manchester but have been commissioned to work with women who live or work in Oldham and Rochdale since July 2023 and deliver a proactive and assertive outreach offer in the borough. MASH was awarded a contract by Rochdale Council on behalf of Oldham and Rochdale Councils to deliver provision between 1 July 2023 and 31 March 2024, with the first 3 months to include scoping work and then to be followed by delivery of the support for women who sex work and who live or work in the boroughs. The total contract value was £58,822 and was split evenly between the two boroughs with Oldham's financial contribution being £29,411.

The service's aim is to improve the health, wellbeing and outcomes of female sex workers working or living in Rochdale and Oldham. Key areas of focus include:

- Sexual Health, including access to sexual health and contraception advice and support and access to STI and HIV testing, and support to access treatment
- Substance Misuse, including harm minimisation advice for drugs and alcohol and support to access treatment and recovery services; needle exchange; access to health services
- Safety, including support for those experiencing homelessness or unstable accommodation via

supporting access to safe accommodation and housing support; criminal justice and wider safeguarding; financial support.

- Wider support, including mental health and wellbeing

In order to ensure that the service met the needs of women sex working in the boroughs, the service initially carried out a scoping exercise to ascertain what the needs of sex workers living and working in Rochdale and Oldham were and also undertook work to understand how the sex work beats and saunas/parlours operate locally. They also developed links with key partner agencies, including Community Safety Partnership, Greater Manchester Police and local services delivering support for substance misuse, sexual health, mental health and those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The service offers support via outreach with a focus on harm reduction, public health messaging and brief interventions. This includes giving out information leaflets, informing women about the services that they can access and providing condoms, dignity packs, food and hot drinks, needle exchange, safety alarms and signposting/referring into local services for ongoing support around sexual health, substance misuse or housing, as well as other support. The outreach worker, along with MASH volunteers and workers from local substance misuse and sexual health services, delivers two outreach sessions a week with the MASH outreach van. The MASH Senior Healthcare Worker provides interventions including sexual health advice, contraception support and screening, on the beat via the outreach van and in saunas/parlours, providing fast track access to get women into treatment.

The service also carries out integrated work and training with key local services, such as substance misuse, homelessness and sexual health services. The service has been warmly received by key stakeholders who have engaged and are working with MASH to embed good practice.

MASH is also undertaking development work with other VCSE organisations in Oldham who are also offering support and who have developed trusting relationships with women who are sex workers. The support offered by other organisations does not have the same clinical governance and oversight as MASH so there is ongoing work to ensure sharing of best practice and that effective pathways and safeguarding procedures are put in place to ensure the safety of women accessing the provision. Furthermore, MASH offers a wide range of holistic gender and trauma informed support. MASH is continuing to work with external

partners to develop their understanding of the challenges women face, especially to accessing mainstream provision.

In the most recent quarter, MASH engaged with and offered casework support to 26 street sex workers in Rochdale and Oldham and identified 20 women in 2 saunas in Oldham and 27 women in Rochdale in 2 saunas. This is more than was expected during the scoping exercise and preparations to go live. Evidence suggests that there is clearly a need for this service, with significant opportunities to make a positive difference to some of the most marginalised women in our society, who are at high risk of STIs, drug dependency, mental ill health, homelessness and significant risk of harm.

The service has had a significant impact in a relatively small amount of time. A further 12 months would enable MASH to continue to work with many of the women who have already been identified, including those women working in saunas who have indicated that they would like to access screening and further support. MASH has also identified a further 20 women in Oldham and Rochdale who they've not managed to engage with, but who they believe to be engaged in sex work. Engaging and supporting women who sex works requires an initial period of trust building, both with women who are sex working and key partners – enacting a 12 month extension would allow for the provider to continue to build on the groundwork that has been made over the last few months and to engage with more vulnerable women, who have the potential to require much more costly interventions and support if they are not able to access the provision that MASH provide and reach crisis or develop more complex issues.

Rochdale Council is currently the lead commissioning authority and awarded one contract to the provider on behalf of both authorities. The contract award was undertaken on behalf of Rochdale Council, by STAR Procurement and Legal. Rochdale Council pay the provider the full contract amount and then reclaim the costs from Oldham. A collaboration commissioning agreement is in place between the two authorities.

It is proposed that Rochdale Council, acting as lead authority on behalf of itself and Oldham Council, extends the contract with Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) by 12 months in accordance with its Contract Procedure Rules to deliver targeted support for women who sex work and live or work in the two boroughs.

The financial contribution from Oldham Council for the 12-month extension will be £42,087 (the total contract value will be £84,174, which will be split equally between Rochdale

and Oldham). The increase in costs from 2023/24 contract value reflects the fact that there will be a full 12 months of provision and that the scoping work and subsequent activity has identified higher demand for the service which has resulted in the need to increase the amount of resource to deliver the service.

Therefore, it is requested that authority is given to continue to work collaboratively with Rochdale Council and extend the collaboration agreement by 12 months so that Oldham Council can delegate authority to Rochdale to instruct STAR Procurement and Legal to extend the contract with Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) for a period of 12 months, from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, so that the provider can continue to provide targeted support for women who sex work and live or work in Oldham or Rochdale with a key aim of improving their health and wellbeing.

**What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):**

***Option A:*** *Do not continue to fund a targeted support offer for women who sex work and live or work in Oldham.*

This is not the recommended option as it does not align with Oldham's priorities of tackling health inequalities for vulnerable, priority or at-risk groups and is not consistent with the commitment within the Oldham Plan to take a person and community centred approach, that places prevention at the heart of our emerging new model of delivery.

There is an evidenced need for this provision and no longer funding it would mean that we lose the significant opportunities to support and improve outcomes for some of the most marginalised women in our society, who are at high risk of STIs, drug dependency, mental ill health, homelessness and significant risk of harm.

***Option B:*** *Approve a 12-month extension to the collaboration agreement with Rochdale Council, under which Rochdale will act as lead authority and commission Manchester Action on Street Health in accordance with Rochdale Council's Contract Procedure Rules.*

This is the recommended option. Extending the contract with Manchester Action on Street Health would mean that we can continue to effectively support the health needs of one of the most marginalised and stigmatised groups in our society by commissioning a provider who is an expert in the field and has proven experience and track record of supporting and advocating for women who sex work to help them experience good health, safety and emotional wellbeing.

**Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.**

Consultation has been undertaken with the Director of Public Health and Cabinet Member of Health and Social Care.

Extensive consultation was undertaken with women who sex work who live or work in Oldham as part of a scoping exercise funded by Public Health in 2021, the findings of which were published in 2022 – a copy of the report can be found in supporting documents section below.

**Recommendation(s):**

The recommended option is Option B: Approve an exemption under clause 21.3 (c) of the contract procedure rule document and to delegate authority to Rochdale Council, as lead commissioning authority, to award the 12-month contract extension on behalf of Oldham Council.

**Implications:**

What are the **financial** implications?

The preferred option (option B) is to approve a 12-month extension for the sex worker project.

The contract will continue to be a collaborative agreement between Oldham and Rochdale Councils, under which Rochdale will act as lead authority and commission Manchester Action on Street Health in accordance with Rochdale Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

The cost of the contract will be £42k. Budgetary provision is available within the base budget for Public Health to meet the costs of the extension.

There are no adverse financial implications as a result of extending this contract.

(Jenny Howarth Senior Accountant/Matt Kearns Finance Manager)

What are the **legal** implications?

Rochdale Council has a contract with Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) for the provision of support services for street and sauna sex workers in the boroughs of Rochdale and Oldham. The contract expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 and Oldham Council will have to rely upon Rochdale Council obtaining relevant approvals to extend the contract and agreement from MASH to extend the term beyond the expiry date. Subject to Rochdale Council obtaining such approval and agreement, Legal Services supports the recommendation to extend the term by a year. There does not appear to be a legal instrument, entitled collaboration agreement or otherwise, between Rochdale Council and Oldham Council

(Mark Hope, Legal and Democratic Services).



What are the **procurement** implications?

The collaboration agreement between the two local authorities where there is a joint requirement is in place to formalise the shared arrangements, including how costs will be shared and how contract management will be undertaken, in order to achieve value and reduce procurement costs. Rochdale Council has been appointed as the lead authority to commission services from Manchester Action on Street Health, this is subject to Rochdale Council's the Contract Procedure Rules.

(Mohammad Sharif, 15/02/2024)

What are the **Human Resources** implications?

There are no direct human resources implications for the Council.

What are the **Children and Young People** Implications?

Women who sex work may be parents and/or have children. Stressors known to hinder parenting include substance misuse, poverty, homelessness, poor health, victimisation, and inadequate social support. Sex workers may experience some or all of these stressors. They also encounter stress from their involvement in a hazardous and stigmatised occupation. While working, they must contend regularly with unsafe working conditions, victimisation, difficult clients, inclement weather, police harassment, and incarcerations. Within these stressful environments, many women who sex work also bear and raise children. The sparse research that has been conducted on mothers involved in sex work has suggested that they may encounter parenting difficulties, however, many sex workers report that they engage in sex work to provide for their children and offer them a better life. Sex workers who are mothers/parents may benefit from various parenting services, including prenatal and postnatal care, parent training, family therapy, parent support, and/or parent mentoring. MASH is able to support women who sex work to access these services, where they exist locally.

Young people may be sex workers themselves. Not only do young people from this vulnerable group face all of the health and social challenges already outlined and potential discrimination, stigma and violence, they also face specific vulnerabilities associated with youth, including power imbalances in relationships and, sometimes, the impact of alienation from family.

MASH has effective policies and procedures in place to safeguard vulnerable adults who use the service or take part in any of its activities. It also has robust policies in place to protect children and young people that may come into contact with the mash service - this includes children of adults who use the MASH service. It also has policies in



working and a preventative approach. The award of the contract is consistent with the commitment within the Oldham Plan to take a person and community centred approach, that places prevention at the heart of our emerging new model of delivery.




Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

**Reason(s) for exemption from publication:** *3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the Council*

**List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:**

Title	Available from
<b>Oldham Sex Work Analysis – Jan 2022</b>	<b>Attached:</b>  Oldham Sex Work Analysis Jan 2022.pc
<b>Impact Assessment Tool – Feb 2023</b>	<b>Attached:</b>  IAT - Targeted Support for Women
<b>Delegated Officer Decision – Sex Worker Support Project (GM MASH) February 2023</b>	<b>Attached:</b>  Delegated Officer Decision - Sex Worker

**There are no appendices**

<b>Report Author Sign-off:</b>	
	A. Entwistle
<b>Date:</b>	05/02/2023

In consultation with Director of Public Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. G. A.', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Signed :

Date: 6 March 2024