

Using behavioural insights to reduce demand for prostitution

March 2020

Scoping report

Social Engine is working with the London Borough of Redbridge to develop a programme to reduce demand for prostitution in the area. This short scoping report sets out the approach to be taken during the course of the project based on an initial review of information, research with key stakeholders and reflecting discussion amongst the project team. Naturally, the aim is to be evidence based in our work; therefore, whilst this document sets out our next steps and indicative time plan, we anticipate that there will be some further refinement to the final project plan.

Project Team

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Overview of situation and ambition



Figure 1 : Area Map of London Borough of Redbridge

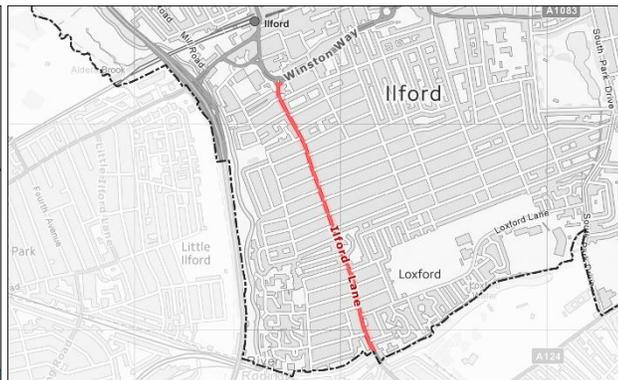


Figure 2 : Map of Ilford Lane

The London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) and a number of local partners have organised various initiatives to tackle the issue of prostitution on Ilford Lane over many years. However the nature of the challenge frequently changes and the impact of interventions are often short lived. Typically, interventions have sought to punish and deter men seeking

sex, with other activities designed to support the women to 'escape' from the industry. Now then, the council are keen to understand more about what motivates men to buy sex and critically, what influences and approaches can positively alter this behaviour. LBR want to use behavioural insight to develop an intervention that looks to tackle the problem and reduce demand among men who buy sex.

Prostitution itself is complex, and by definition happens in the shadows. There are multiple issues affecting women involved in prostitution, often addiction, intersectionality with gender based violence, mental health problems and poverty. More recently trafficking and slavery has been a significant problem with its close connection to organised crime, causing conflict in the community and greater concern for the women involved.

There are multiple challenges with engaging men including, the secrecy and shame of purchasing sex, guilt, a transient population and differing cultural norms and expectations.

The effects of prostitution are often adversely felt in the local community and wider population. A review of local media coverage provides a good understanding of how the issue is perceived. A number of stories feature concerns relating to littering (condoms and promotional flyers), locals feeling intimidated by criminals involved in the sex trade, associated problems with drug use and sales, as well as concerns about the impact on children and family life. Ilford Lane, whilst it is a hotspot for prostitution, is otherwise a busy location with shops, transport links and housing co-located. Concern raised by local people suggests many feel it is blighted by the sex trade and that this in turn threatens the long-term future of the area.

Dealing with the issue is a priority for a number of statutory and community groups, but it also represents a political priority. The Council has set out a strategic ambition to ensure that communities can benefit from regeneration, to improve family life and to tackle social challenges. An ongoing delivery plan recognises the importance of partnership working in tackling the root causes of challenges such as prostitution as well as the wide range of support strategies that are needed to keep the women involved safe. It is intended that this project will provide new insight which can be of real benefit to the various partners and projects seeking to improve life in the borough.

There is a recognition that prostitution and how it is perceived more generally is an acutely 'gendered' issue, with a prevailing narrative that is inherently misogynistic. Such a deeply embedded framing disregards the multiple vulnerabilities affecting many of the women involved and sees them 'blamed' for the industry and its impacts. Media portrayals of women can veer from 'temptress vixen' to the 'unclean untouchable'. Neither of these caricatures comes close to the experience of many women which is more realistically likely to involve vulnerability, abuse, poverty and ill-health. Working closely with support groups and other partners the council continues to seek ways to support women involved in prostitution. Such activities have involved health advice, support with

substance use, benefits advice, housing and immigration matters. However, there is a recognition that the public narrative is out of step with reality and the council is keen to explore ways to shift the focus from women to one which questions why men seek sex and to challenge the perception that they are 'innocent' parties in the trade.

To date, activities targeting men have tended to focus on enforcement. Public Space Protection Orders cover significant locations in the borough, or in the case of prostitution the whole of the borough. Breaches of have seen men who purchase sex issued with Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) and in some cases, court action. There has also been significant activity targeting the criminals involved in sex trafficking and organised crime and related immigration matters.

We have been advised that FPNs are perceived as having some impact on reducing prostitution in Ilford Lane. However, it is worth noting that local enforcement data should be approached with caution as these can only reflect those caught who buy and use prostitutes openly with no shame who are often from countries where prostitution is legal. It is clear that they don't reflect the full market, with many men in the community being guarded about their use of prostitutes and attempt to hide their transactions when overt enforcement is present.. Further, we note that one of the changes that has been observed of late is the reduction in street prostitution but with the increase in 'pop up' brothels in the area, and some activities transferring into neighbouring boroughs of Newham and Barking and Dagenham. These factors necessarily dictate caution when interpreting the available data.

Public Spaces Protection Orders

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) are used by local authorities to help tackle anti-social behaviour. Four PSPOs are in place in Redbridge, one relating to dog control (borough-wide), two that restrict the consumption of alcohol and related anti-social behaviour (spitting, begging, urinating etc) in specific parts of the borough and a fourth which covers prostitution related activity. Breach of the Order can result in a Fixed Penalty Notice (£100) and court action in the case of non-payment.

The Prostitution Related Activity Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) came into force on 15 August 2018 for a period of three years and covers the whole of the borough.

Clearly, there is considerable learning from the various activities that have sought to reduce prostitution over the years. In this earliest phase we have learned more about the unintended consequences of some actions – e.g. it is felt that some of the enforcement has pushed the activity into neighbouring boroughs. Significant for future work, the council believes that whilst trafficked women have previously been a significant proportion of the estimated 30 working in the area, recent targeting means that numbers have reduced to

approximately three. Those three women involved in prostitution are believed to be white, British women, likely all to be drug users.

Against this background then, our project team has considered a number of factors during this scoping phase in order to focus and refine our proposed approach, these include:

- Review of complaints associated with prostitution – considering location, sex litter and conviction data.
- Insight from interviews conducted with key stakeholders including community safety officers, councillors, neighbourhood management and local enforcement.
- Analysis of enforcement data identifying demographic characteristics of men buying sex.
- Brief review of research literature on the motivations and behaviours of men who buy sex.

Understanding the nature of the problem

Initial evidence and insight gathering conducted to inform the project scoping and trial and intervention design included reviewing a range of materials and information, as well as analysing data and holding discussions with key members of the project team.

A range of data is collected by LBR on prostitution on Ilford Lane in a number of different ways:

- Records kept by the enforcement teams detailing the nationalities and postcodes of those prosecuted for prostitution related activity.
- Data on the number of complaints made to the street cleansing service related to volumes of sex litter (e.g. stickers advertising brothels) and locations of complaints.
- Information on possible brothel sites in Redbridge and actions taken against them.
- Records of online reviews of women involved in prostitution left on online (on a website providing a platform to find, review and contact local women involved in prostitution).

These are the primary records collected and therefore a principle source of evidence that we have used to better understand the challenges faced and to inform the project scoping.

In this scoping phase, we also briefly reviewed a range of previous academic and practitioner evidence on the behaviours and motivations of men seeking sex services. This includes research data on what we know about who buys sex, the views, attitudes and reasons men buy sex and a brief assessment of successful deterrents.

Findings from our analysis

LBR provided a range of data on the issue of prostitution in Redbridge. As part of the scoping phase we reviewed the data in order to generate greater insight into the issue. Three types of data were reviewed:

The first contained information on brothel sites in Redbridge. The data included information on the number of brothels in Redbridge that had been identified and closed down, as well as whether the site was a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) or Single Room Occupancy (SRO).

The second dataset related to street cleansing and provided insight into residents' perceptions of prostitution in Redbridge. This included complaints made to the council by local residents in regards to flyposting publicising brothels and other women involved in prostitution materials.

The third set of data included information about men soliciting sex in Redbridge. This included demographic and geographic information on men who have been prosecuted or issued with fines for breaching the Prostitution Related Activity Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), as well looking at users of an online forum to review women involved in prostitution, to gain an insight into the attitudes of those using women involved in prostitution.

The data review highlighted some key insights:

- Convenience is key – most men visiting women involved in prostitution live within a 3 mile radius of Ilford Lane.
- Many men who visit women involved in prostitution describe the women in a dehumanised and disparaging manner, viewing the experience as a transaction; suggesting that their behaviour is devoid of empathy or understanding for the woman involved.
- There is evidence to suggest that men desire women involved in prostitution as a proximate for intimate relationships that may be missing in their lives.
- Certain communities are over-represented in the numbers of men caught soliciting sex, e.g. Romanian men. However, this may be the result of different cultural or social norms that exist i.e. less fear or perceived stigma of being caught, or related to a transient population.

Brothel sites in Redbridge

LBR provided data on their ongoing attempts to shut down brothel sites in the area for the period July 2018 to January 2020.

Around one third (32%) of all 'confirmed' or 'highly likely' brothel sites were located within close proximity to Ilford Lane, reinforcing the view that this is the epicentre of prostitution within Redbridge.

Of the potential brothel sites, 39% are in HMO or in a property which is in the process of registering as such. The figure may be higher as not all HMOs are licensed. SRO and those that applied for the license account for 31% of the sites. The relatively high proportion of HMOs suggest that there may be an opportunity to target landlords who are licensing out properties that are being used for prostitution. While it is not clear if landlords are complicit in, or simple unaware of, the activity taking place in their properties, this represents potential point of contact in the chain of sex work in Redbridge.

LBR also provided data on the number of women involved in prostitution advertising cards picked up in the local area. In total 31 different types of cards were picked up, with 25 unique mobile numbers being used, as some cards used the same mobile number. Comprehensive information on when and where the cards were picked up is not recorded. Recording these in the future, if practical, would be beneficial in order to help measure any change associated with our proposed intervention.

Residents' perceptions of prostitution

LBR provided summary data on the number of complaints made to the street cleansing service about 'flyposting' by local residents. In total 42 complaints were made in the last two years: 27 in 2018 and 15 in 2019. The reduction in complaints may be associated with the perceived reduction in the numbers of brothels and on-street women involved in prostitution during the same period. The data provides information on the complaint, when it was filed, and where the flyposting took place.

The most common location for a complaint is Cranbrook Road (9) followed by the High Road (6), and Eastern Avenue (4).

The majority of complaints refer to flyers or stickers left for 'massage parlours' or more explicit flyers depicting naked women.

*"Stickers have been stuck on poles around the area offering massage services"
- Resident complaint*

Those complaining describe the flyers as 'unsightly' and residents express concern that if they are not cleaned up, it will encourage others to flypost. Others worry that children may see the inappropriate flyers.

"This is obviously not the type of behaviour to be encouraged and having these types of stickers on the poles is not only unsightly but will encourage others to also place stickers on." – Resident complaint

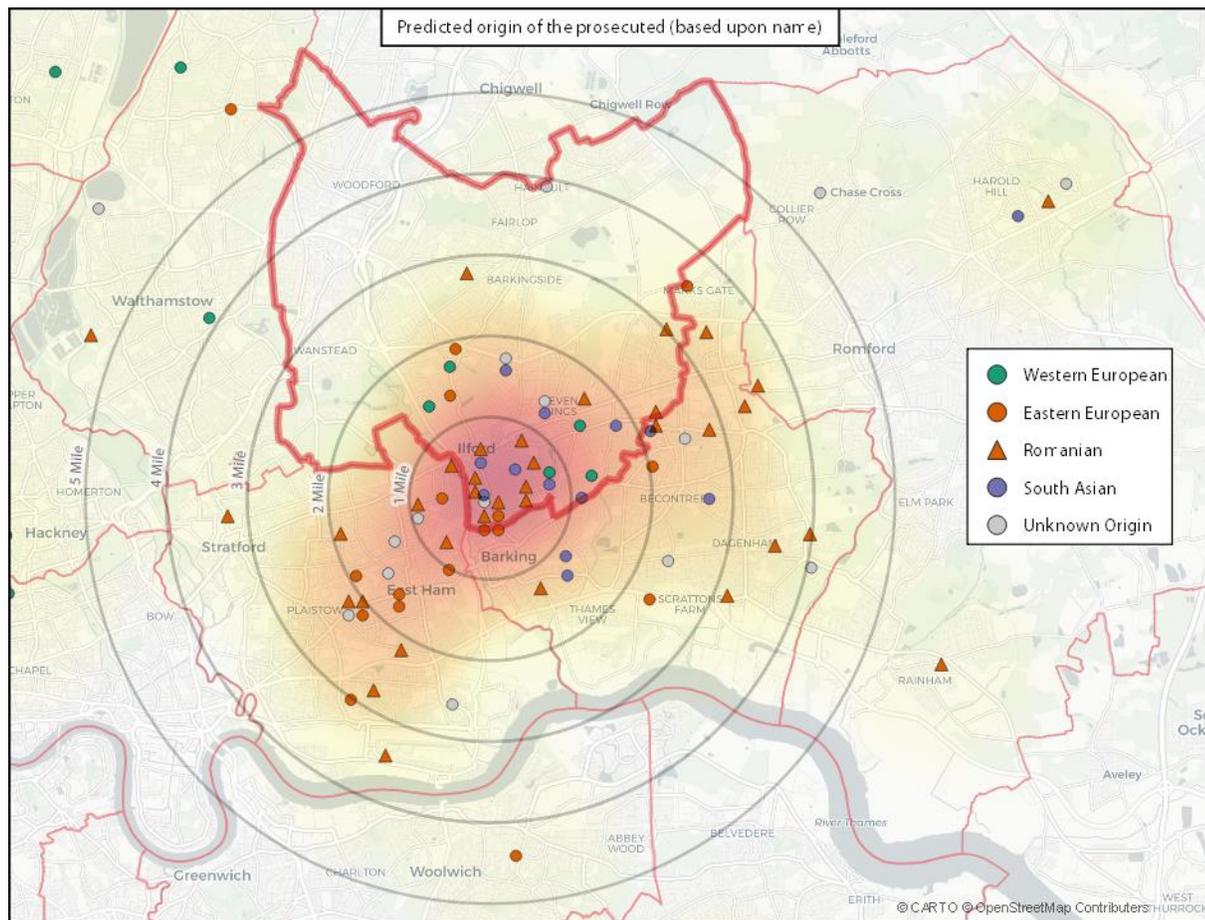
"Caller states by wording it is obviously a brothel - not nice for pedestrians particularly children walking past." – Resident complaint

An article in the press reported that children in the area were 'swapping fly-tipped erotic massage cards like football stickers' with local parents demanding action¹.

Men soliciting sex in Redbridge

LBR provided data on the number, nationality, and addresses of men who had been prosecuted under the Prostitution Related Activity PSPO for soliciting sex in Redbridge.

When mapping the address of those prosecuted under the Prostitution Related Activity PSPO (see below), it shows that, of the 112 recorded cases, the majority of those prosecuted originate from the area close to Ilford Lane.



This can be expressed statistically, with 14% of those prosecuted under the Prostitution Related Activity PSPO, living within 1 mile of Ilford Lane, with 50% living within a 3 mile radius of Ilford Lane.

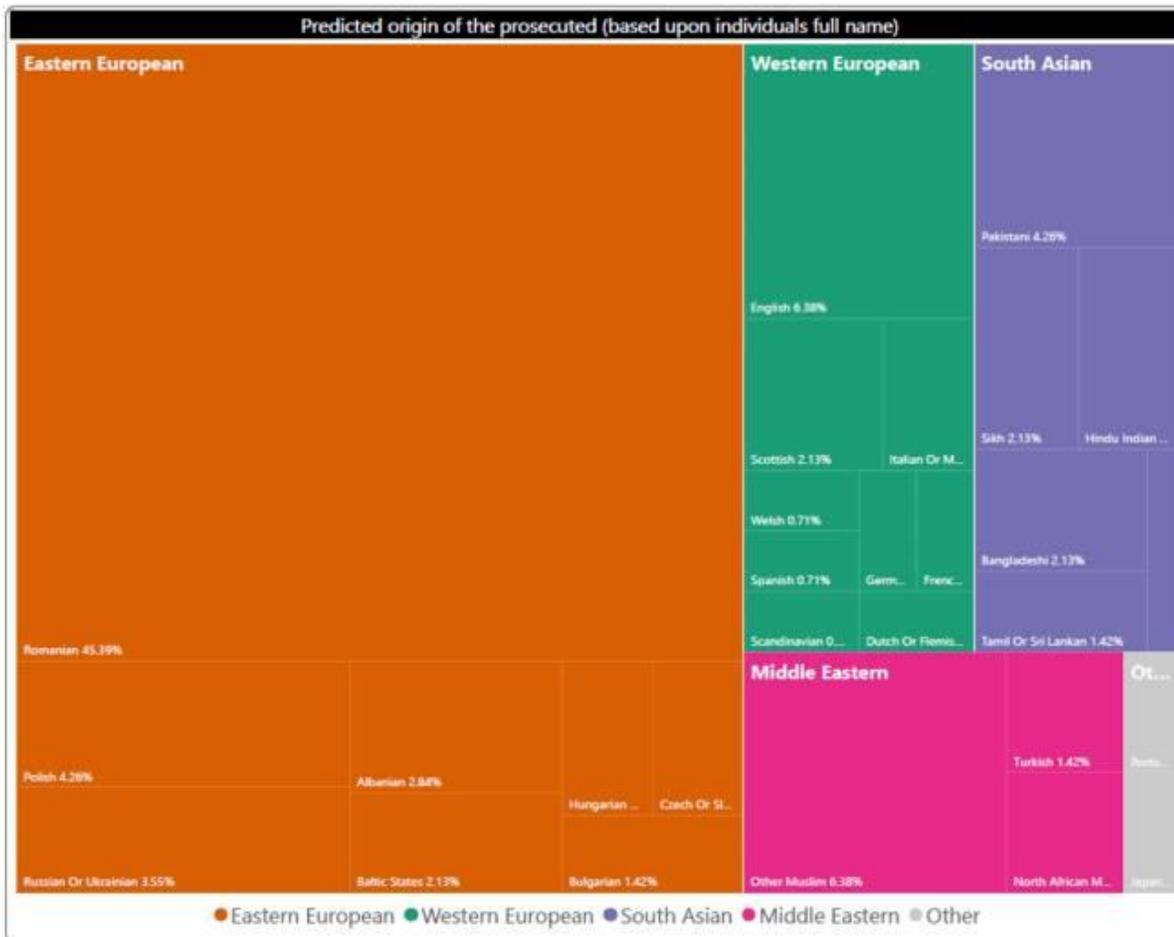
¹ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/east-london-parents-demand-action-after-children-caught-swapping-flytipped-erotic-massage-cards-like-a4265331.html>

Proximity to Ilford Lane	% of those breaching PSPO
Per Cent Within 1 mile	14%
Per Cent Within 2 miles	21%
Per Cent Within 3 miles	50%
Per Cent Within 4 miles	59%
Per Cent Within 5 miles	68%

LBR data indicates the country of origin of those prosecuted for breaches of the PSPO. In total there are data for 141 individuals. Acknowledging that these data reflect only those who buy sex openly in front of enforcement officers and not those who do so unobserved, the majority of those prosecuted come from Eastern Europe (62%), Romanians alone make up 45%. However, there are sizeable minorities of Western European, South Asian, and Middle Eastern people being prosecuted.

Like many local authorities in London, Redbridge has a diverse population. Redbridge has a lower percentage of residents from white British ethnicity than the London average and has many more residents who are from Asian ethnicities including Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi than the London average.² As of 2011, residents from EU Accession countries made up 3.5% of the population.

² Redbridge population information from: https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/media/2319/draft-redbridge-borough-profile_reduced.pdf



The council also provided information from an app/website used to review women involved in prostitution. This proved to be one of the most informative pieces of evidence. The reviews gave an insight into the perceptions and attitudes of those using women involved in prostitution, and provided intelligence of more practical elements of soliciting a women involved in prostitution such as likely day / time, duration of stay and travel arrangements needed. Including time or day, duration, and travel.

The website describes itself as the 'The UK's oldest escort directory and escort review site'. They offer users the opportunity to rate their experience with a women involved in prostitution, including a description of the premises, the women involved in prostitution and the overall experience, as well as information on duration of their visit, amount paid and whether they would 'recommend'.

There are 14 reviews written by users who have visited a woman involved in prostitution in Redbridge. The vast majority of these reviews were written in the period 2010-2015 (93%) with only one review written in the past 4 years (in 2018). With such a small sample size and predominately historical accounts; whilst this data gives an insight into the thoughts of these men purchasing sex in Redbridge, it may not be a representative sample of men purchasing sex or reflective of the current situation in the local area.

Analysis of the 14 reviews involved looked for patterns in the types of visits that took place, as well as thematic analysis of the men's descriptions of their experiences.

Given the small number of reviews, drawing strong conclusions should be avoided, however, the analysis does highlight some interesting patterns.

- Half of all visits took place over the weekend.
- Visits were spread fairly evenly throughout the day; midday (11am-1pm) 31%, afternoon (1pm-6pm) 23% evening (6pm-8pm) 46%. With no visits starting after 8pm.
- The majority of visits lasted for around 30 minutes, and typically cost around £50 or £60 per hour.
- Most users recommended their experience (57%), but there were a sizeable number (36%) of reviews from users who did not. Negative reviews tended to focus on; the unwillingness of a women involved in prostitution to undertake a particular sexual act, the perceived lack of interest on behalf of the women involved in prostitution, and the feeling that the exchange was purely transactional.

In the section where users described the premises used, four notable themes emerged.

1. The most common theme in the descriptions of the premises concerned the fear of being observed. Most users commented on how easy (or not) it was to enter the premises discreetly, and gave lower ratings if they felt they were likely to be observed.

“Not discreet as there are kids playing on the landing outside the house”.

2. Personal safety is also a concern. Reviews mentioned safety in regards to visiting at night, highlighting that for some users there is an acknowledgment that they are putting themselves into a position of danger, relating to the fear of a 'pimp' or a gang.

“Would not feel safe after dark.”

3. Parking is also raised by users. Most men seemed to drive to their visits. Being able to park close by was seen as a plus, this may well be driven by convenience but also a desire to limit the likelihood of being observed.

4. Users remarked on the general cleanliness of the premises. However, there was no empathy displayed towards the woman who had to work/live in these conditions permanently.

“Shabby shop above car sales”

In the section with the description of the women involved in prostitution, two dominant themes emerged.

1. Users' descriptions of women involved in prostitution are dehumanising and reduce descriptions to a crude critique of physical attributes.

*"A little too much makeup"
"5ft. Skinny... Bit spotty"*

2. Although women originating from various different countries are mentioned, the most common nationality is Romanian. Teenage women mentioned tended to be Romanian, perhaps indicating the possibility they were trafficked; however this must be considered speculative.

In the section describing their experience with the women involved in prostitution, four major themes emerged.

1. The users' reviews of their experiences are often, especially in the case of negative reviews, devoid of the women involved in prostitution feelings about the situation. There is no thought provided to the description of how the women involved in prostitution may be made to feel.

"Lisa was hard to get on with, constantly complained and clearly hates her job. This was a really bad experience and eventually I'd had enough and left."

"Was totally disinterested, no interest in satisfying the customer, and constantly complained at change of position"

2. For most users the exchanging of money for sex is seen as a confirmation of blanket consent. And when a woman involved in prostitution refuses a sexual act, the users express aggravation and indignation, with comments suggesting they perceive this as breaking of an agreement.

"She went like a statue and made no movement...she said she doesn't do this WTF"

3. In the more positive reviews, users often talk about receiving the GF (girlfriend) experience. This may include talking, hugging and kissing. It highlights that for some users the most positive experiences are ones that more accurately reflect conventional relationships, highlighting that for some loneliness and a desire for intimacy might be a driver for visiting a woman involved in prostitution.

“She provides a GFE experience... allows you to talk and role play... and generally makes you [feel] special”

“felt like she was my girlfriend rather than a stranger... She is an angel... Definitely a keeper”

4. Some men have developed relationships with women involved in prostitution that have continued over many years. For them, there is a normalcy to seeing a woman involved in prostitution, suggesting deeply embedded behaviours and values around visiting a woman involved in prostitution.

“Had met Sonia more years ago than I care to remember at Le Chateau soon after it opened. Pleasant trip down memory lane”

Conclusions from the data review

Whilst the data helps paint a more detailed picture of prostitution in Redbridge, there are limits to what can be gleaned. The data reinforces pre-existing narratives and theories surrounding the demand for sex work in Redbridge, without necessarily providing significantly new avenues to explore.

The data review shows that there is a need to enhance this desk research with stakeholder engagement to gain a more detailed understanding of the problem, which focuses more on understanding behaviours of those soliciting women involved in prostitution. This may include direct engagement with men seeking sex and women involved in prostitution however, given the difficulties connecting with these groups, it will more likely involve engaging with those working with them.

Insight Gathering – Stakeholder Interviews

To help shape our initial thinking we spoke to a number of key stakeholders with considerable experience of tackling prostitution in Redbridge and had been identified by the project team. This included, community safety officers, councillors, neighbourhood management and local enforcement.

The interviews consisted of 10 core questions which looked to understand more about the attitudes and behaviours of men seeking sex and the impact this has on the local community to Ilford Lane.

Participants in these interviews were keen to share their understanding of the ongoing issues on Ilford Lane with a number keen to highlight that prostitution is a “vicious cycle” and “comes and goes in waves”. Participants felt that enforcement initiatives to tackle

prostitution were only reactive to residents' complaints with short term effects that rarely looked to address the root cause of the problem such as human trafficking or gang culture.

Within this section all quotes are from stakeholders interviewed during the scoping phase and, as such, represent their opinion on the situation.

"The residents complain, enforcement is stepped up, the girls move elsewhere or behind closed doors but once the police leave the women come back on the street again. Then the residents complain again... it's a vicious cycle"

"[It's] the same circle of things. I don't think there is a quick fix and building that trust takes time – we need to figure out what the root causes are and tackle that."

Information provided by the council detailing efforts to tackle prostitution on Ilford Lane, suggest that often the initiatives are short term and liable to be discontinued once prostitution levels are seen to have decreased. Many stakeholders felt a long-term behaviour change model would have a greater impact in helping to reduce the demand for prostitution on Ilford Lane.

Although the effects tended to be only short-term, many felt that enforcement and "high police visibility" was the most effective way of deterring men from purchasing sex. Enforcement, with greater authority as a result of the introduction of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), was felt to be a powerful deterrent to stop men 'kerb crawling', coercing women on the street or buying sex.

"I think the kind of thing that works is that visibility. When it's in your face. That's what reassures the public who complain. The visibility has worked really well"

Stakeholders also commented that one of the most effective ways of tackling prostitution involved "collaboration across services" for example street teams and women's support services being given a direct number to call the police to report soliciting behaviours.

"Teams across services have come together more and we are better at what we do. Now the Enforcement Team and the Police Community Protection Team work so closely. If and when we see a man pick up a woman, we call a private number which gets straight to the police team who come out straight away to intercept."

Similarly, the increase of visual deterrents and improvements to the immediate environment such as the introduction of electric gates, anti-sticker paint on lamp posts and the installation of CCTV have reduced the numbers of men seeking sex on Ilford Lane.

"Visual deterrents and inceptions have worked the best – us acting as big brother. "

When asked why they thought men purchase sex, stakeholders responses varied widely. Some stated that men purchase sex as its "convenient", others for "companionship" or "to have power and control." Others felt it was for "sexual gratification" as "some men just

have an itch they need to scratch.” Interestingly, stakeholders reported that men who were caught buying sex and given a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) by enforcement would often try to cover up the true nature of their behaviour and appeared to feel shame.

“When we stop men they are sheepish and embarrassed”

“We give them a £100 fine... Men don’t want to go to court as people might find out what they have done”

When asked how residents to Ilford Lane reacted to prostitution in the area stakeholders felt there had been a shift in attitudes away from ‘blaming’ women. However, the public continued to feel “threatened and victimised” by the “air of threat” that prostitution brings including an increase in antisocial behaviour and crime.

“The majority of them [the public] are just upset. It’s a huge issue”

Stakeholders felt that while residents are concerned about prostitution “on their doorsteps” they do have a considerable amount of power and influence in the local area. Residents’ meetings are regularly attended by members of the community who engage with services and council representatives to express their concern. The local meetings acted as a platform for residents to share their views and give feedback directly to the “top level.”

“They complain about it to the top level e.g. council and the council will always manage to get funding if enough people complain.”

“I think they [residents] have a lot of power when they complain...It’s quite political in the community on Ilford lane and they can get away with things – a bit of an enigma. The community and councillors have a fair bit of clout and the power behind that gets things done.”

These interviews provide useful insight into perceptions from a range of involved parties. Key highlights include the role of an empowered community as part of a potential solution. Further, comments highlighting feelings of guilt and shame of men themselves is consistent with findings from academic literature and previous research.

Literature Review

We conducted a brief review of previous academic and practitioner evidence on the behaviours and motivations of men seeking sex services.

Who buys sex?

Research evidence suggests that between 6-10% of men have bought sex in the past 12 months prior to the studies taking place, and around 20% say they have bought sex at

least once in their life³. Of the men who buy sex, 1 in 4 do so on a frequent basis (at least weekly or monthly), accounting for 75% of total market transactions. This means that just 2.5% of the adult male population account for 75% of all purchasing of sex from prostitutes.

Studies comparing men who buy sex to those who do not, find more similarities than differences in their demographics – with one notable exception. Men who buy sex are less likely to be married⁴, yet around 50% report being in a romantic relationship.

However, the two groups differ in other behavioural and attitudinal aspects: men who buy sex hold more negative and violent views towards women, report more frequent use of pornography, are less satisfied with their marriages, and are more tolerant of cheating.

Studies suggest the reasons why men buy sex include, but are not limited to; intimacy, to have sex without emotional commitment, to engage in sexual acts that their regular partners are not willing to engage in, boredom, sex addiction and compulsion, having a variety of sexual partners, and loneliness and shyness⁵.

Within the population of men who buy sex, attitudes and behaviours vary. In addressing this variability, some studies have created typologies that characterise men who buy sex. These typologies roughly divide buyers of sex into two categories: those who want to stop buying sex and those who do not; or into those who feel negative emotions – shame and guilt - about buying sex and those who do not.

One study found that around 60% of men have considered stopping buying sex¹, and in another study around 60% of men reported feelings of shame and guilt about their behaviour⁶.

Why do men continue buying sex despite wanting to stop or feeling guilty about it?

Although people may have formed intentions about changing their behaviour, this doesn't necessarily mean that they will actually change their behaviour. Behavioural science tells us that people's emotions and intentions don't always match their behaviour and actions. When this intention-action gap occurs, people experience internal conflict - also defined as cognitive dissonance - which can be psychologically painful. To resolve this conflict, people employ several psychological tricks (such as blaming others) which help to rationalise and excuse their behaviours in ways that help them to maintain their own self-perception.

³ <https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf>

⁴ <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:36906/datastream/PDF/view>

⁵ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/238796.pdf>

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260515600874>

Beliefs as rationalisations

There is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of men who buy sex endorse certain beliefs that are unsubstantiated by the available evidence; common examples being that women in prostitution enjoy having sex and that prostitution reduces the likelihood of rape. These beliefs, which are not supported by evidence, can help men rationalise and justify their behaviour of buying sex. This technique helps to free them from experiencing cognitive dissonance and negative feelings such as guilt.

A recent study found that among many variables, the ones that were most strongly associated with buying sex were false beliefs¹. These type of beliefs reflect a diverse repertoire of psychological defences, including *denial of the victim* ('prostitution is a victimless crime'), *denial of injury* ('there is no harm involved'), and *advantageous comparisons* (comparing a socially unacceptable behaviour, such as prostitution, with even worse behaviour like rape to make the original behaviour seem more acceptable). There are some examples of anti-prostitution campaigns (albeit without being robustly evaluated) that have attempted to counter these unsubstantiated beliefs that are widely held by men seeking to buy sex.

Fear as a deterrent

The likelihood of arrest for soliciting sex can be a powerful deterrent - in one study, 85% of men said that it would deter them from buying sex and almost 50% of high frequency buyers reported to have stopped buying sex due to police presence in an area⁷. Moreover, sex-buyers are 70% less likely to re-offend after arrest. In another study, deterrent factors most commonly cited by the participants were 'name and shame' type deterrents, such as being added to a sex offender register or more informal sanctions such as publicising the identity of the offender on an advertising hoarding⁸.

The effectiveness of this 'name and shame' approach has however generated concerns too – such as the impact on the families and the stigmatising nature of the penalty which can have devastating effects on the reintegration of the offender to society. - This approach is therefore not without ethical and moral challenge.

Punishment certainty appears to serve as a greater deterrent than the severity of the punishment. In order for people to be discouraged from transgressing, they have to be convinced that there is a significant risk of arrest. Evidence shows⁹ that:

- buyers of sex do not perceive the risk of arrest to be high;
- only 5% of buyers have been arrested for soliciting sex;

⁷ <https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/ChallengingDemandScotland.pdf>

⁹ <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:36906/datastream/PDF/view>

- 50% of buyers would consider not purchasing sex again if the risk of arrest was greater.

One way of increasing punishment certainty is by strategically increasing enforcement on the streets - thus making enforcement more 'visible' in the eyes of people, which can be effective at deterring offending behaviour. This approach has been applied in Redbridge with positive effects.

However, interventions based on this strategy (more street enforcement to increase perceived risk of arrest) show mixed results in their effectiveness to target demand for prostitution and are not felt to be sustainable or affordable in the long term. People do not always carefully weigh-up and consider the costs (being arrested) and benefits (pleasure derived from purchasing sex) of their actions.

Behavioural science tells us that sometimes people act irrationally and make decisions that are susceptible to emotions and temptations and subject to cognitive biases that lead to people making choices that may not be in their best interests. Of course, this does not mean that increasing the perceived risk of arrest is not a good tactic because people do behave rationally sometimes – but the frequency with which we know people behave irrationally means this approach cannot be regarded as a panacea. The evidence leads us to conclude that in order to produce long-lasting and fundamental change in the effort to tackle prostitution we need to intervene in ways that address psychological complexities and nuances of the target audience in an holistic way.

Research findings on deterrents are somewhat limited in the robustness of their implications because there is a considerable gap between what people say they might do – *they would stop buying sex if the risk of arrest was significant* – and what they will actually do.

Important insight comes from a study¹ which instead of asking the hypothetical question *what would deter men from buying sex*, asked former buyers of sex - men who used to buy sex in the past but have stopped – the reasons why they stopped buying sex. The most common reason given, cited by 72% of men who previously bought sex, was that buying sex was inconsistent with their moral values, followed by the second most common reason which was fear of contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

Conclusions and implications for project scope

Having conducted our initial scoping work, we have reached a number of conclusions based on the evidence available:

Recent efforts to tackle prostitution in the area with high visibility enforcement have had a positive impact on reducing the number of women involved in prostitution operating in the

area. Whilst this is a positive development, it does reduce our 'sample size' and further opportunity to reduce the prevalence of prostitution in the borough.

Local perceptions of the negative impact of prostitution are as important as the actual nature and scale of the problem. Consequently, it is important that the project aims to improve local perceptions as well as tackling actual demand for prostitution.

Displacement is a considerable and real risk – whereby taking action on prostitution in the area simply pushes sex-workers and men seeking sex into other parts of Redbridge or into neighbouring boroughs.

Whilst their impact can be significant, the actual number of women involved in prostitution and known or suspected brothels operating in the area is fairly low (current estimates suggest there are three regular women involved in prostitution in Ilford Lane). No proactive work is currently undertaken to detect potential brothels, so any that are identified are the result of complaints from residents. Project team members have suggested that the current women involved in prostitution around Ilford Lane are primarily British women, with their working intrinsically linked with drug addiction. However the feeling among stakeholders is that without continued enforcement Romanian prostitutes would be likely to return to the area, and that almost all the women encountered through enforcement action against brothels have been Romanian.

The number of men seeking to buy sex is extremely difficult to accurately quantify and the reported number of breaches of the PSPO may or may not be an accurate reflection of the prevalence of demand for prostitution locally. Similarly, the demographic characteristics and location of men seeking sex that have been fined for breaching the PSPO may or may not be representative of wider population of men seeking to solicit prostitution.

Nonetheless there appears to be a strong correlation with proximity to home – with half of those found breaching the PSPO living within 3 miles of Ilford Lane and 59 percent within 4 miles. We note that transience in the population may mean that some people do not stay for long and have less regard for legal and cultural constructs.

The fear of being caught or simply observed appears to be a major feature in the perceptions of men seeking sex. They also appear to be concerned with their own personal safety (but not that of the women involved in prostitution). The vast majority of men (85%) said that the likelihood of being caught would deter them from buying sex and even among men who do so regularly, 50% reported to have stopped buying sex due to police presence in an area. Those who have been arrested are 70% less likely to reoffend. The risk of being caught appears to be a more significant factor than the severity of the consequences of being caught.

Studies suggest that a majority of men that buy sex may have feelings of guilt and regret about their actions and that a similar proportion want to stop buying sex, or have contemplated doing so in the past.

Men seeking sex appear to routinely dehumanise the women they are soliciting, regarding their experience in wholly transactional terms – a consensual exchange of money in return for sex. They tend to hold more negative and violent views towards women than men who do not seek to buy sex.

A series of unfounded and unsubstantiated beliefs are held by men that buy sex about the nature of prostitution in order to avoid cognitive dissonance. These include: the belief that prostitution reduces incidents of rape and that prostitution is a victimless crime.

It is important that we recognise prostitution within the context of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Throughout this scoping phase we have captured a range of insight that identifies those women involved as being vulnerable in multiple ways and often criminally exploited. It is clear that policy has moved on substantially in recent years, with CPS¹⁰ guidance recognising the need to focus support, rather than blame on women. However, this is not necessarily observed in the prevailing popular narrative or amongst men.

Whilst we recognise a range of campaigns that have sought to shift the emphasis onto men it is clear that there is little robust evidence of the impact of these – empirically or anecdotally. However, we suggest it would be appropriate to revisit these hypotheses in subsequent work.

Four working hypotheses emerged from this initial analysis and discussion:

1. Increasing the perceived likelihood of being caught buying sex is likely to reduce demand for prostitution. This may indicate a role for the community as the ‘frontline’ against the issue.
2. There are a sizeable proportion of men that seek prostitutes who are keen to modify their behaviour (to stop) and who feel guilty about paying for sex.
3. Inconvenience (access, lighting, parking, perceived safety) are deterrents for men.
4. Men buying sex display a cognitive dissonance regarding the issue. This can manifest itself in a false perception of the transaction as a legitimate trade or indeed see a justification of the act as providing earned pleasure (for themselves).

It is our suggestion that we consider these (and potential other emerging) hypotheses in subsequent work.

¹⁰ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/prostitution-and-exploitation-prostitution>

Summary of proposed approach

Whilst prostitution is a visible problem, the perpetrators are not necessarily identifiable or their motivations well understood. Behavioural insights enable us to understand that a range of factors that influence our attitudes and behaviours. To assist with the project, we wish to gain an understanding of the psychology and influences on behaviour among men seeking prostitution.

Whilst our preferred approach would include outreach and direct engagement with a range of parties, the outbreak of COVID-19 has required us to consider how best to secure good insight whilst necessarily reducing the risk of illness. Naturally, we would keep activities under review and seek to alter, or mitigate, as the situation develops.

We propose to gain first hand insight into prostitution on Ilford Lane via a range of methods, for example:

- Analysis of data and existing literature exploring why men purchase sex
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Observational evidence (road side) – if this is not practical, we will seek CCTV and body-worn camera evidence.
- Stakeholder evidence (such as Romanian women's support groups)
- Online survey to be promoted via social media
- Focus groups – where appropriate these might be conducted via video conferencing, or indeed supplanted by 1-2-1 interviews.

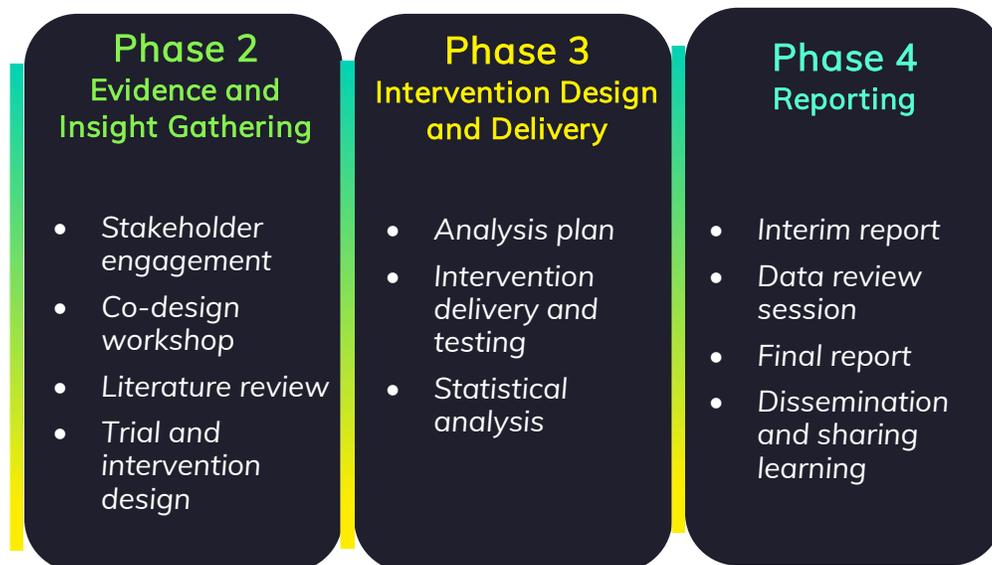
Once we understand the motivations behind why men purchase sex on Ilford Lane, and what values need to be challenged to tackle prostitution, an approach to reduction using behavioural insights can be developed, with creative and communications work being undertaken alongside the project team from LBR and other partners, as appropriate.

We will consider the various influences on behaviour and the potential approaches to change this, bringing to bear an understanding of how dual processing within the brain can lead to actions or attitudes. Potential routes include:

- Peer pressure – and the use of social or cultural norms
- Messenger – the use of influencers in messaging approaches or channels
- Intrinsic and extrinsic incentives – and how they might be applied
- Defaults/heuristics – understanding how habits and beliefs can shape behaviour.
- Salience – looking at ways to secure 'cut through' with messaging and approaches. This approach to be considered in relation to the perceived blame narrative.

Proposed methodology

Our approach to the project identifies four distinct stages. An iterative design methodology will ensure that each stage is informed by the previous. Our approach to the project design and delivery is based on co-production and working collaboratively with the LBR project team in order to meet council expectations, to support organisational learning and help build capacity and capability. Having completed phase 1 (scoping) the following three phases remain:



Following the completion of the scoping phase we will undertake further evidence and insight gathering in order to develop and refine the trial and intervention design.

1. Stakeholder engagement. We will conduct a series of interviews and, if it is feasible to do so, focus groups with key stakeholders in order to gain further insight into the motivations and psychological drivers underlying the behaviours among our target audience. This will help us to test and refine the underlying assumptions in our intervention ideas. We recognise that studying offending behaviour is not without its challenges. In the endeavour to recruit for our interviews men who buy sex we will consider adapting the recruitment and sampling process of previous research studies on prostitution that adhere to research ethical standards.
2. Desk Review of Evidence. Robust research into why men purchase sex – is despite its importance to policy-makers, somewhat limited. Prostitution is a subject with a considerable body of academic research offering a potential source of evidence of effective influences and drivers on behaviours and attitudes which may be of relevance to the project. Whilst recognising that not all previous studies will be

sufficiently robust or relevant to inform this work, we will examine academic and practitioner evidence on prostitution and purchasing sex more broadly to identify that which can help to inform our approach and understand more about what might work.

3. Behavioural indicators. In developing a greater understanding of our target audiences, we have identified an emerging set of current and desired behaviours, which we will refine and build upon as the project progresses.
4. Co-design workshop. We will work collaboratively with the LBR project team and key stakeholders in a co-design session to develop our experimental research method and interventions. We will explore the current behaviours and underlying motivations among our target audience, based on the insight gathered from our stakeholder engagement, set expectations and measurable goals of our intervention, as well as identify opportunities to influence behaviour change. The final part of the session will use a co-design process to develop a range of intervention ideas. The output of this workshop will be an agreed design of our intervention trial which will be tailored to address the psychological and behavioural drivers that contribute to the demand of sex in the borough. Should COVID-19 restrictions remain in place we suggest a small group session to be held via video conferencing. Our facilitation will ensure that this approach supports creative and collaborative working, albeit remotely.

Co-design and intervention development

Having developed a clear and evidence-informed understanding of our target audience and knowledge of their likely motivations and influences on behaviour, the next phase of the project will be to develop creative ideas and messaging that can be mobilised through a targeted intervention.

This stage will see us consider what approaches are most likely to resonate with target audiences. Working with the LBR team we will consider how the current narrative impacts on women. Using a co-design process the project team will work collaboratively to develop intervention ideas and more appropriate messaging.

Using a range of tools including the Cost/Value exchange matrix¹¹, we will explore various approaches to encourage behaviour change. Alongside nudges we would explore the potential to use 'shoves', 'hugs' and 'smacks' as part of our marketing mix. Together we will develop a range of new, creative approaches designed to deliver impact.

¹¹ See: <https://strategic-social-marketing.vpweb.co.uk/Key-Models.html>

Our team will develop an overarching approach, with recommended message framing and suggestions of suitable delivery channels. Drawing on our extensive experience of social marketing we will develop concepts for discussion based on the insight generated from the insight-gathering phase of the project.

Three principles in particular can be seen as useful to this project, these are:

- Reframing and personalising the issue - making the issue relevant to target audiences.
- Rooting the behaviours/ inspiring change - defining the actions needed and modelling or facilitating these.
- Supporting change - extending the reach via networks and signposting.

Delivering our interventions

Earlier phases of the project will have allowed us to pinpoint the primary location(s) for testing our intervention. Shaped by insight and co-design we will define interventions designed to resonate with the target audiences.

Whilst the specifics of this audience cannot be predetermined, it is our intention to call upon the range of behavioural motivators, marketing and social psychological factors which will increase the likelihood of our intervention having a positive impact.

Statistical power calculations and Impact Evaluation

We have considered how best to test and evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions. Our scoping has taken into account the number of suspected brothels (during the period Aug 2018-Jan 2020); the number of men breaching the Prostitution Related Activity PSPO (114) and the estimated number of women involved in prostitution in the area.

Uncertainty of the true number of men seeking to buy sex (and the unreliability of using the number of those prosecuted as a proxy for this) make it impossible to conduct statistical power calculations in any meaningful way.

Our conclusion is that the complexity of randomisation and outcome tracking, coupled with a very small (but imprecise/unknown) sample size and the covert nature of such behaviours, make a randomised controlled trial (RCT) impractical to deliver as a means of evaluating the impact of the project.

Nonetheless, we are committed to defining precise goals and using appropriate evaluation methods to critically assess impact in the most rigorous, but practical, way possible. Our proposed approach would combine quantitative and qualitative measures to build a picture of actual and perceived change over time in the prevalence of (demand for) prostitution in the borough.

Output measures – LBR’s street cleansing service currently collects information on the content, volume and location of sex litter within the area and monitor the number of complaints received. They also track the resources required to deal with the problem. These output measures are an important indicator of the extent of prostitution in the area but can only be one part of the potential route for evaluation.

Perception measures – we recognise that the visibility of prostitution and its effects is a cause for concern for council staff, political members, and stakeholders, as well as the wider local community. Consequently, their perceptions of prostitution on Ilford Lane and the Council’s response to it will also be a key factor in measuring the success of the project. Following our intervention(s) we would expect to see a shift in the perceptions of those within these key groups and we will programme in qualitative measurement and evaluation of perceptions to assess this.

Behavioural metrics – we have previously identified some of the behaviours that we would like to alter, as well as some of those that will pave the way for long-term change.

The precise approach to evaluation will be developed as part of the iterative project design; in order to ensure the method takes account of the actual intervention design and delivery plans. However, we anticipate that this will include a combination of output and outcome measures, combining quantitative and qualitative data. There may also be an opportunity to use a comparison group (a ‘synthetic control group’) to provide further evidence of attributable effect.

Indicative timetable

Insight gathering and stakeholder engagement will be used to test our emerging hypotheses and the results, once analysed, will inform the co-design of our intervention(s). We anticipate a period of approximately 4 months will be required to test our intervention(s) but this will greatly depend on the iterative intervention design process.

The following timetable is indicative and likely to change as the project develops, particularly in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to tackle it:

- Research and Engagement Plan – April 2020
- Fieldwork begins – May 2020
- Insight gathering and stakeholder engagement – May-June 2020
- Analysis of evidence and insight – June 2020
- Co-design and Intervention development June - July 2020
- Behavioural insight intervention delivery – July – November 2020
- Evaluation, analysis and reporting –December 2020 - February 2021.