

Sex workers protection scheme

A national scheme to improve the safety of sex workers by telling them about dangerous punters is to be run from Manchester.

The Ugly Mugs scheme, to be based in East Manchester, has been launched with a £108,000 grant from the Home Office and will be run by the UK Network of Sex Work Projects.

Research has shown that sex workers are targeted because they are vulnerable to violence, but crimes against them often go unreported to the police.

The Ugly Mugs scheme will inform sex workers signed up to it of "dangerous individuals" in their area, using e-mail, text message or phone apps. Any information that could identify an individual is removed, so as not to prejudice court cases or lead to vigilante justice.

In addition, if the victim gives consent, the scheme will feed information about any attack anonymously to police intelligence, which has a database of more than 20,000 serious sexual offences.

Alex Bryce, Ugly Mugs national co-ordinator, said: "There is considerable evidence



Bryce: offenders highly mobile

to suggest that some offenders who target sex workers are highly mobile and commit offences in several areas.

"Local Ugly Mugs schemes exist in other countries and have existed in the UK for around 20 years but this is the first time in the world that it has been done on a national scale with government funding."

Examples of mobile offenders include Gary Allen, who went to prison for attacks on sex workers in Plymouth. He had

previously been acquitted of a sex worker murder in Hull. After being released from prison he subsequently breached a Sexual Offences Protection Order for approaching sex workers in Scunthorpe.

Violence

Another is Matthew Byrne, who had a high public profile in Liverpool as a manager of a local youth charity. He picked up a street sex worker in Coventry and took her to his home in Wirral, where he subjected her to horrific violence and torture.

There were other reports about him in the local Ugly Mugs schemes in both Coventry and Liverpool, which worked with the police to bring him to justice. In 2010 he was sentenced indefinitely.

"Sharing alerts nationally will hopefully enable projects to cross reference intelligence and increase the potential to warn the women and detect perpetrators," said Tina Threadgold, operations manager at charity Manchester Action on Street Health, which

runs a local scheme, Dodgy Punter. "This will hopefully minimise the risks and harm to sex workers and bring perpetrators to justice."

Threadgold said sex workers are seen as easy targets for offenders because they work in secluded areas at night where public activity is limited, and that historically sex workers did not report crime, often perceiving violence towards them as a hazard of the job.

"Offenders can rely on this," she said.

Lynne Featherstone, Home Office minister, said: "The government is committed to helping all women who have been the victim of a crime and giving them the confidence and support to come forward and report crimes."

Bryce said: "The fact that the Home Office has funded this scheme and we have so much support from senior police officers is an acknowledgment that sex workers have the same right to police protection and access to the criminal justice system as everyone else."

KELLY MATTISON



Vietnamese Paralympic javelin and discus athlete Nguyen Thi Hai in training at the Spring Hall athletics track in Halifax last week before heading to London for the start of the games. The Vietnamese team used Spring Hall – run by Calderdale Council – Bradford College and Bradford University as its training camps for the games. Thi Hai contracted polio when she was less than two years old but overcame it to become a record holder in her sports.

Greens elect leader

The Green Party's national leadership election is due to take place in two weeks, and the bookies' favourite is Liverpool's Peter Cranie.

The last European Parliament election proved disappointing for the Greens, as Cranie lost the North West seat narrowly to BNP leader Nick Griffin by a margin of just 5,000 votes out of five million.

Cranie (pictured), a further education lecturer, claims the party could win "seven seats in the next major national elections – the Euro-elections in 2014 – following a succession of near misses last time".

The leadership election is a result of Brighton MP Caroline

Lucas's decision to step down. She said the contest will broaden opportunities for the "range of talent" the newer party members have to offer.

Spencer Fitz-Gibbon, Cranie's campaign media officer, claimed the Green Party is gaining a stronger voice in the North West by focusing on "job creation and offering alternatives to the austerity agenda", which Fitz-Gibbon believes makes Cranie the "strongest candidate".

Earlier this year, however, the Greens, now in control of Brighton Council, were criticised for voting through spending cuts by activists who said they should have refused to set a budget instead.