

# **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

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### **Note on the use of language**

Different language is often used by individuals and organisations to refer to people who are involved in prostitution. This Strategy adopts terminology that aligns with the Scottish Government's definition of violence against women which includes prostitution/commercial sexual exploitation, and is contained within the [Equally Safe Strategy Refresh](#) (women involved in prostitution, or women who sell/ exchange sex). Within this Strategy, where the abbreviation CSE is used, it refers to commercial sexual exploitation.

## Ministerial Foreword

Our commitment to challenge men's demand for prostitution is an important part of the delivery of our [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#) and our [Equally Safe Strategy](#), which both aim to ensure we live in a society where all individuals are safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse, as well as the attitudes that perpetuate it.

This Strategy builds on that commitment by reinforcing the clear message that there is no place for the exploitation of any individual and that prostitution is recognised as a form of violence against women and girls - with the Strategy rooted in the aims of our Equally Safe Refresh. We recognise the links to wider forms of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and our work to tackle violence against women and girls more broadly.

Last year I attended a performance organised by the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation which shared the words of women involved in prostitution and those who have exploited them. Hearing the words of men who had purchased sex was disturbing, with the misogyny of their words ubiquitous. The normalisation of this behaviour towards women must be tackled by all.

Prostitution clearly cannot be viewed in isolation and has wide reaching impacts for individuals involved – intersecting many aspects of inequality and poverty. This was highlighted in Scottish Government commissioned lived experience research which has been key in informing the Strategy and shines a light on how we can collectively improve support for those with experience of prostitution.

The Strategy outlines the next steps we will take, working across government and with stakeholders to implement its aims. This will include piloting an approach, this year, to improve access to support across Scotland for those with experience of prostitution, with support made easier to navigate through the development of a support pathway. This will be supported by a national hub, which will strengthen the links between specialist and mainstream services. Lessons learnt from the piloting of the Strategy will help inform any future legislative considerations, including whether to criminalise the purchase of sex.

The development of the policy principles and the Strategy included contributions from a range of stakeholders and those with lived experience, and I would like to thank them for their continued work in supporting those with experience of prostitution. As we now implement the Strategy, their role will be key and we will continue to listen to the voices of practitioners, and importantly those with lived experience.

It is only by working together that we can successfully challenge men's demand and better support those with experience of prostitution. Delivering this Strategy will therefore require collective leadership across organisations to ensure we turn the Strategy's policy principles into practice.

I look forward to building on the collective drive and commitment to challenge demand and improve outcomes for those affected.



**Siobhian Brown**  
**Minister for Victims and Community Safety**

## Strategic Approach

This Strategy sets out the Scottish Government's collective approach, working with stakeholders across the wider public and third sector, to challenge and deter men's demand for prostitution and support those with experience of it. In common with the Nordic Model the Strategy seeks to enable women to safely, and sustainably, exit from prostitution. The Strategy will also raise awareness and educate the public, relevant service provisions and mainstream public services to recognise that women with experience of selling/exchanging sex are victims of exploitation.

The Strategy will also provide the mechanism to continue the discussion around any future legislative considerations and the evidence to support that. In doing so, the Strategy will proactively challenge men's demand for prostitution.

The key components which form our strategic approach, and which have been informed by our continuous stakeholder engagement are:

- **disrupting, deterring demand and tackling its drivers.**
- **improving access to support and tackling stigma.**
- **recognising those involved in selling/exchanging sex are victims of exploitation.**
- **a new support pathway.**
- **establishment of a multi-agency group** to support the Strategy's implementation and to inform our wider policy approach to tackling all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

### Policy Context

Improving support for those with experience of prostitution is at the heart of the Strategy, which is underpinned by a person-centred approach reflecting the values of our [National Performance Framework](#) and is aligned to the principles of GIRFE (Getting It Right for Everyone).

This Strategy, whilst focusing on prostitution, has relevance to other forms of commercial sexual exploitation, such as human trafficking and other circumstances involving exchanging sex. The Strategy recognises the links to wider forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), forming part of our broader response to tackling VAWG.

Both the Strategy and its principles are relevant to those working across the Scottish Government, wider public and third sector, who are delivering or developing relevant policy and services. It should be read alongside [Scotland's Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy](#), [the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – updated 2023](#), [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#) and [Equally Safe](#) – Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. A policy map giving an overview of wider related policies can be found on page 14.

In September 2020 we undertook a consultation on prostitution. This was an important first step in developing the approach to tackling prostitution within the context of how women and girls should be viewed in an equal society. There was a

high level of engagement with over 4000 responses from individuals and organisations. The need to further recognise and address the structural and systemic disadvantages experienced by women and girls was a consensus viewpoint. The findings from the consultation informed the Strategy's development as did [lived experience engagement](#) work, commissioned by the Scottish Government and carried out by an independent research team. The project aimed to understand current support service provision and the needs of those with experience of selling/exchanging sex. This research highlighted the importance of partnership working and the need to better understand and tackle stigma.

We want to ensure our policies work for those with experience of prostitution and future evaluation of the Strategy will continue to draw on lived experience. This will continue to be a key component part of our work.

The Strategy development also draws on international lessons learned on challenging men's demand and supporting those involved in prostitution, with an international evidence [review](#) carried out by Scottish Government's Justice Analytical Services, published in July 2022. This highlighted that key elements of international challenge demand approaches included support for victims and changing social attitudes.

### **Further background**

The Scottish Government has committed to incorporating the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into Scots Law, within the limits of devolved competence. [Article 6](#) of CEDAW requires public authorities to 'take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.'

The Scottish Government committed to the UN Sustainable Developments Goals in 2015. These are 'global goals and targets that are part of an internationally agreed performance strategy. All countries are aiming to achieve these goals by 2030. [SDG Goal 5.2](#) includes: 'eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.'

### **Current Legislation**

Current legislation is clear that no one can be forced into sexual activity without their consent. There are a number of specific offences which make certain activities associated with prostitution illegal, including:

- Running a brothel
- Trading in the prostitution of others and procuring for the purposes of prostitution.
- Soliciting or loitering in a public place for the purpose of purchasing sex
- Soliciting or loitering in a public place for the purpose of selling sex
- Procuring or attempting to procure any woman or girl into prostitution.
- Trafficking persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation

## Key Aims

**The key aims of our strategic approach are to improve support for women, including to sustainably exit prostitution, and to challenge and deter men's demand through education, awareness raising, more informed public and private sector service provision and engagement, and where evidenced, through legislation.**

The policy principles make clear the need for a national approach that is understood and promoted throughout policy and practice and reinforces that there is no place for commercial sexual exploitation in Scotland. Given that prostitution cannot be tackled in isolation, a whole system approach will be required to deliver the Strategy. The delivery will be supported by related work across the Scottish Government, wider public sector and third sector.

**Our strategic approach focuses on four key components, which draw on underpinning policy principles. These key components are outlined in the diagram below and will be supported by key activities.**

**A key part of our strategic approach is taking a preventative approach, tackling the drivers of exploitation, taking account of social and economic inequalities.** This Strategy therefore has relevance to the Scottish Government's wider work to tackling poverty and gender inequality and creating a fairer society. Improved policy cohesion, with continued application of the Strategy's policy principles is therefore an important aspect of our ongoing collective approach.



## Policy Principles

Six policy principles underpin this Strategy, and support wider related policy and practice, across Scottish Government and the wider public and third sector. These were developed by a [short life working group](#) and supporting reference group and published in December 2022.

As well as being at the heart of the Strategy we will expect organisations working with those involved in prostitution and those designing relevant policy, strategic plans, and services, to take account of these principles as they carry out and apply their role, as part of our collective response to tackling prostitution and supporting those with experience of it (taking a trauma informed approach), and challenging and deterring men's demand.

### **Principles to challenge men's demand for prostitution and support for those with experience of it.**

#### **National approach**

A strong, consistent, and unambiguous national message that is understood and promoted throughout policy and practice on national and local levels that reinforces that there is no place for commercial sexual exploitation of any individual in Scotland.

It will make plain that prostitution and wider commercial sexual exploitation are a form of violence against women and girls, and that this will not be tolerated in Scotland. Those perpetrating exploitation (such as sex buyers and profiteers) will be held to account.

#### **Victims of exploitation, not criminals**

A legal and societal framework that understands the specific circumstances associated with those involved in prostitution and acknowledges this group as victims of exploitation, and not perpetrators of crime.

Those involved in exploiting, recruiting, managing, coercing and/or forcing individuals into prostitution, forms of human trafficking, and those who commit violent and sexual offences against this group receive punishment proportionate to their crime.

#### **Promote social inclusion and address stigma.**

Wider societal awareness of the harms associated with prostitution, with services and communities supporting those involved.

There will be a focus on changing attitudes around the purchase of sexual activity. This will be underpinned by broader societal change, forming part of our wider actions to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls and the attitudes that perpetuate it, aligning with the [Equally Safe Strategy](#) and the [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#).

#### **Preventative approach**

A collective response across government, and the wider public and third sector, and civic society, to tackle the systemic societal and economic disadvantages and circumstances that can foster sexual exploitation. Supported by educational and public awareness initiatives, across society, aimed at deterring demand.

#### **Supporting recovery and sustainable exit**

Ensuring that all adults with experience of prostitution can access both emotional and practical trauma informed support, at any stage, and that there is a pathway of tangible long-term and consistent support when ready and preparing to exit. Support should be available for those who continue to be affected after they exit.

#### **Learning from lived experience.**

An adaptive framework informed by those with experience of prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation to ensure our approaches work for them.



## Actions and timelines

The Strategy and its principles aim to guide an ongoing approach which will help us collectively identify opportunities for relevant services to further collaborate to improve support for women.

The Strategy's delivery, working across Scottish Government, along with the wider public and third sector, will be supported by key activities outlined below.

### **Component 1 – Disrupting, deterring demand, and tackling its drivers.**

#### **Key Actions:**

**Establishing a new multi-agency group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)** – which helps support the Strategy's implementation and informs our wider policy approach to tackling all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. The group will inform the longer-term monitoring, review of this Strategy, and ensure a broader recognition of the interconnected policy areas and the need for consistency in language and approach.

Target Date: March 2024

**Improved policy cohesion, with continued application of the Strategy's policy principles** – at the heart of the principles is the aim for them to be realised in policy and practice, and as part of their publication the Minister for Victims and Community Safety wrote to Ministerial colleagues to ask them to further consider how they can be embedded across their areas of work. They aim to guide further, longer-term policy cohesion, across government and the wider public and third sector on relevant policy and service design. This will help to tackle the drivers of exploitation, as part of our preventative approach, as well as improving support for those affected.

Target Date: Published December 2022 and now applied throughout Scottish Government and reflected in the refreshed Equally Safe strategy. Progress and application of the policy principles will be reviewed through the multi-agency group.

### **Component 2 – Improve access to support and tackling stigma.**

#### **Key Actions:**

**Mainstream services, including: employment, welfare, health, housing, education, and justice - having a wider awareness of CSE and the impacts on those involved**, building on the existing [CSE Aware](#) training and resources that are available for those across the public and third sector. This will ensure staff are equipped with the relevant skills and awareness of available provision and understand their role in supporting those with experience of prostitution. An improved awareness of CSE across mainstream services will also form part of our preventative and early intervention approaches.

In addition, continuing to identify further opportunities to raise awareness across wider society- this forming part of our broader approach to tackling VAWG.

Target Date: Underway and ongoing

### **Component 3 – Recognising those involved in selling/exchanging sex are victims of exploitation.**

#### **Key Actions:**

**A victim-centred trauma informed Justice approach** – a collaboration with Justice partners, including Police Scotland, to ensure that women involved in prostitution are recognised as victims and are offered support and advice. This will build on existing practice whereby guidance to current service providers is provided and expanded to interconnect with the establishment of a new national support pathway to ensure a holistic approach to enable women to exit from prostitution. This approach aiming to ensure that women feel safe in outlining their circumstances in the knowledge that services are equipped to provide non-judgemental, informed advice on potential next steps.

Target Date: Underway and ongoing

### **Component 4 – A new support pathway**

#### **Key Actions:**

**Establishing a new national support pathway** aiming to ensure a clearer, better connected, and coordinated pathway of sustainable support for those with experience of prostitution, which will include support to exit prostitution.

Target Date: To pilot before summer 2024 with ongoing review and evaluation, with recommendations on next steps within 12 months.

**Establishing a National Hub for Specialist CSE support services**, overseen by a co-ordinator, which will help organisations share resources and good practice and help co-ordinate the new support pathway. This will bring together existing provision more closely and identify opportunities for further collaboration. The learning from the Hub will feed back into the new multi-agency group on CSE to help inform future policy development.

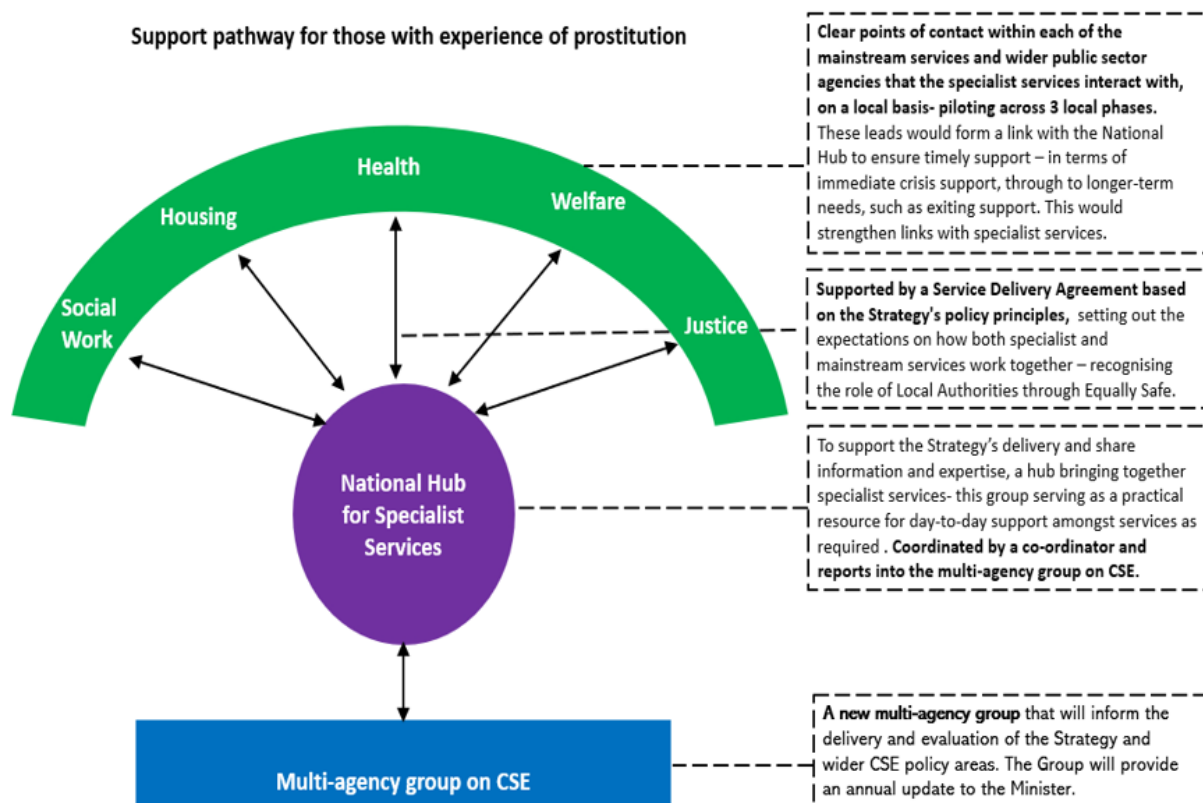
Target Date: April 2024

## Support Pathway

*'It's like you have to tell your story over and over again. So you're working with one service and then you're getting directed to another, and then sometimes information isn't getting passed on, you're having to go through everything again. And that's not down to, well, it is down to the services, it should be working alongside each other, you know. ([Lived Experience research](#))*

The lived experience [research](#) highlighted the need for a more consistent approach to the accessing support for those with experience of selling/exchanging sex. The need for a more co-ordinated approach was demonstrated by the research finding that on average its participants had seven different support needs. In addition, the Encompass Network's [snapshot surveys](#) also highlight the range of support that may be accessed and need to take an intersectional approach, recognising the overlaps with broader aspects of VAWG, such as domestic abuse.

We will work with stakeholders to better co-ordinate support through the development of a new national support pathway (as outlined below). This will build on current support and existing good practice, identifying opportunities to improve access to support.



## **Piloting Our Approach**

We will pilot the approach in summer 2024, in a phased approach (replicating the support pathway model on page 10).

This will be achieved by identifying and prioritising three areas to pilot this approach:

- Edinburgh and Borders
- Highland, Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen, and Dundee
- Glasgow and Ayrshire

This will ensure that the local authority services in each area have a clear and managed pathway to accessing specialist support and that specialist support organisations have access to the relevant local authority contacts.

As part of this we will ensure an approach that responds to the particular needs of rural and island communities that are in the pilot areas.

### **The improved support pathway aims to:**

- raise awareness of CSE across Scotland
- ensure that the policy principles and the aims of this Strategy are applied in terms of relevant service design and delivery. With the policy principles informing a service agreement, setting out the role of mainstream and specialist services within the pathway.
- share knowledge and good practice across all relevant partners, feeding into the new multi-agency group on CSE, which will help implement the Strategy and consider policy related to wider areas of CSE.
- Help to ensure more timely support for women with experience of CSE, with a clearer route to the support needed.
- Provide data/ insights on the support needed across Scotland- which will help inform future policy development- with the aim of continuing to improve support for women with experience of CSE.

We will pilot and evaluate this process from summer 2024. We will also publish a webpage detailing further information on the organisations involved in the support pathway delivery.

## **National Hub**

To support the three pilot areas (and national rollout thereafter) and as part of the broader vision within the Strategy, specialist organisations supporting women affected by CSE will also be brought together within a National Hub for Specialist CSE support services, overseen by a Scottish Government funded co-ordinator, which will help organisations share resources and good practice.

The co-ordinator will connect these services to the relevant local authority contacts when needed and strengthen the links between specialist and mainstream services locally and nationally.

The learning from the Hub will also be fed into the new multi-agency group on CSE – which in turn will support the implementation of the Strategy and consider policy development on CSE more broadly.

As part of the pathway's development and to support the introduction of the National Hub, we will work with our local authorities, health boards and Police Scotland in the pilot areas, to ensure they understand how to signpost women who need support to the specialist services within their communities.

Following the roll out of the pilot across the three local phases, the Hub would aim to provide a network of support that organisations across Scotland could seek advice from.

## **Multi-agency group on CSE**

In addition, a new multi-agency group on CSE will be established, to bring together key partners to help implement this Strategy and to consider the work to tackle wider forms of CSE. The group will aim to discuss future policy development and act as a forum for knowledge exchange.

The group's work will be driven by the Equally Safe Strategy and the clear definition contained therein that commercial sexual exploitation is activity which includes prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography, and trafficking. The work of the group will also align with the Scottish Government's Vision for Justice in Scotland.

Representation on the group will include stakeholders from the public and third sector- including practitioners working directly with adults with experience of CSE. A list of the membership will be accessible [here](#) following the Group's launch in March 2024.

## Overview of policies contributing to the Strategy- Policy Map

Given the cross-cutting nature of prostitution, a holistic approach is needed to both tackle demand and support those with experience of selling/exchanging sex. Key to the Strategy and its underpinning policy principles, is the need for a consistent approach across Scottish Government and the wider public sector, in terms of related policy and practice.

This Strategy forms part of our wider approach to tackling commercial sexual exploitation and links closely with our [Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy](#). The new multi-agency group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation will further develop our approach co-ordinating our efforts to tackle CSE holistically.

Challenging demand also requires looking at the issues ‘upstream,’ taking a preventative approach and identifying opportunities to engage with young people as part of their wider relationships and education. Our work to tackle demand also includes raising awareness of the complexities of CSE across wider society through projects like [CSE Aware](#) which increase awareness of Commercial Sexual Exploitation across the wider public and third sector. Work will continue and engage men in discussions about VAWG to promote behaviour change, such as the work of organisations like [White Ribbon Scotland](#).

An important aspect of disputing demand is removing the drivers of exploitation. This Strategy is cognisant of the need to respond to the systemic societal and economic disadvantages that women face, in order to address the conditions that can drive exploitation. This also involves recognising the risk factors and circumstances that can lead to exploitation. Poverty is one of the key drivers for exploitation and there are a range of relevant actions we are taking to tackle it. One example is our approach to maximise benefit uptake which remains centred around being aware of, and addressing, the barriers that can exist for people accessing Scottish benefits.

Our Justice Vision and the [findings of the Women in Justice Leadership panel](#) both highlight the need for urgent action to ensure women are better served by our approaches to Justice and the need for trauma informed practice across the justice system. The importance of the impact of stigma was also highlighted by the lived experience research and in addition the need to be aware of layered stigma. Our approaches to tackling related experiences where individuals may experience stigma, such as addiction and mental health, are aware of the overlaps in tackling the stigma associated with commercial sexual exploitation.

The Scottish Government supports a range of projects supporting women with experience of commercial sexual exploitation, from crisis support through to support, when ready, to exit from prostitution sustainably – further information on these and the wider policies that contribute to the Strategy can be found in a [supporting annex](#).

The policy map below gives an overview of this. Further information on the support available for those with experience of prostitution and information for practitioners can be found on the Scottish Government’s [Safer Scot webpage on Commercial Sexual Exploitation](#).

## Equally Safe

## Vision for Justice

### 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

Disrupting and deterring demand	Removing the drivers for exploitation	Improving access to support & tackling stigma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy</li> <li>Serious Organised Crime Strategy</li> <li>Violence Prevention Framework for Scotland</li> <li>National Guidance for Child Protection</li> <li>Gender Based Violence in Schools Framework</li> <li>RSHP school education programme</li> <li>The CSE Aware project- which aims to raise awareness across the wider public/ third sector of the signs of exploitation and aims to improve access to support for those with experience of it.</li> <li>Policy development to tackle misogyny.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benefit take up strategy</li> <li>Scottish Welfare fund</li> <li>Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan</li> <li>Debt advice services</li> <li>Housing support &amp; homelessness prevention</li> <li>National Missing Persons Framework</li> <li>Alcohol and Drug Treatment Strategy</li> <li>Ending Destitution Together Strategy</li> <li>New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy</li> <li>Support post prison release</li> <li>Student Support/Finance</li> <li>Continuing care and aftercare for care leavers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GIRFE &amp; GIRFEC</li> <li>National Trauma Transformation Programme</li> <li>Women's Health Plan</li> <li>Sexual Health Action Plan</li> <li>Best Start Maternity Strategy</li> <li>Drug and alcohol support</li> <li>Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing Strategy</li> <li>Hospital Navigators Programme</li> <li>Employability support</li> <li>Housing to 2040 Strategy</li> <li>Delivering Equally Safe funded projects with a focus on CSE</li> <li>Relevant VCAF funded projects, such as TARA</li> <li>Victim Support Scotland's Emergency Assistance Fund</li> <li>Safer.Scot CSE webpages</li> <li>SARCS</li> </ul>
Underpinned by Policy Principles		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Approach</li> <li>Victims of exploitation, not criminals</li> <li>Promote social inclusion and address stigma</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preventative approach</li> <li>Supporting recovery and sustainable exit</li> <li>Learning from lived experience</li> </ul>



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