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Committee
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Dear Karen,

I was pleased to meet with the Committee on 24 February and provide you with further evidence relating to the Scottish Government's High Level Action Plan in response to Concluding Observations received from the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

During that session, I undertook to provide the Committee with more information on the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to protect women from harm related to commercial sexual exploitation.

As you'll be aware having very carefully considered the Criminal Justice Committee's Stage 1 Report on the Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill and reflected on what we heard during evidence sessions, the Scottish Government concluded that whilst we support the fundamental principle of criminalising the purchase of sex, we retain significant concerns with the provisions as drafted in the Bill, particularly the safety of those who sell sex. This is further detailed in the Minister for Victims and Community Safety's response to the Committee's report, which can be accessed [here](#).

The Stage 1 scrutiny of the Bill and the debate on the 3rd of February underlined the complexity of the issues connected with prostitution, and we consider significant further examination is needed to determine the powers required, in order for these to be effective operationally (for example, for police), particularly in an online context, and we did not think there was sufficient time left in this session to be able to amend the Bill and consult. Consequently, regrettably, we were not able to support it at Stage 1.

However, the Scottish Government will always consider what more it could do to tackle commercial sexual exploitation and strongly supports the Committee's suggestion of an Independent Commission with a clear remit and defined timeline for reporting and consider that is complementary to our existing [Strategic Approach](#).

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety outlined during the Stage 1 debate that she has instructed officials to immediately start work on the establishment of a Commission so

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that options are available for the Minister with responsibility for this issue following formation of the next Government, so that this work can be continued.

Work to establish the Commission has been underway and Fiona Taylor QPM has recently been appointed as Chair of the Independent Commission on the Criminalisation of the Purchase of Sex in Scotland. Fiona Taylor brings a distinguished record of public service, including as Deputy Chief Constable and Interim Chief Constable of Police Scotland. Her extensive experience in senior leadership, stakeholder engagement, and navigating sensitive and often complex issues will be invaluable to the Commission. More information on the Commission can be found [here](#) and further information including its Terms of Reference will be published in due course. It will undertake its work independently of government.

If this government is returned, we would ensure such a Commission was time limited so that any legislation required can be put before MSPs as early as possible in the next session, informed by the Commission and public consultation.

This is not an end to our work to tackle commercial sexual exploitation and improve support for those with experience of selling sex.

The discussions on the member's Bill and the insights from those with lived experience will help inform this and our work to improve access to support for those with experience of commercial sexual exploitation. I would like to reassure that ensuring that we get this right for those with experience of selling sex continues to be at the heart of our approach.

We will immediately increase support for those involved in prostitution, as well as the £400,000 outlined in the budget, we are also providing an additional £65,000 to the Women's Support Project to continue vital work supporting women to exit prostitution.

This builds on our existing support for those with experience of CSE, which includes, for example Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA). In 2025/26, we are providing £622,000 to TARA. TARA provides support and assistance to women who have been trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation.

Also, as part of our continued work to deliver our strategic approach to challenge demand for prostitution we will continue to work with Police Scotland to support the implementation of their new approach to prostitution, Operation Begonia. As part of this work, we have been working with Police Scotland to further strengthen the connections between police and local support services, which will help pave the way for an improved pathway of support. The funding we have provided for Operation Begonia also supports Police Scotland's work to respond to the online aspects of prostitution. In addition the funding has also helped support the development of a new training resource for police, informed by lived experience, to be launched later this year, to improve support for women with experience of commercial sexual exploitation.

We have also recently launched a new public information campaign on commercial sexual exploitation which aims to raise wider awareness of the signs of exploitation and importantly, it also offering another route for those with experience to report concerns. Recognising that commercial sexual exploitation occurs in a range of settings the campaign also includes resources of the hotel and accommodation sector. Further information can be found here: [Commercial sexual exploitation in Scotland | Crimestoppers](#).

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Officials have also been undertaking work with Skills Development Scotland and other organisations in the employability and training sector, to develop a guide for practitioners who are working with women with experience of commercial sexual exploitation, to support conversations when women are ready to consider their next steps. The guide has been recently launched and can be [accessed here](#).

And recognising the support needs that women with experience of commercial sexual exploitation online may have, we have been working with the Mhor Collective, as part of our work to deliver Equally Safe, to develop a resource to improve support for women with experience of the online aspects.

I am grateful for the insights that the Cross- Party Group on CSE, and as co-conveners, that both yourself and Ruth Maguire have previously provided on this issue, and I hope this update reassures you of our ongoing work and commitment to continue to implement our Strategic Approach to challenge demand for prostitution and improve support for those with experience of it.

I trust this covers the detail the members were seeking.

Yours sincerely,

KAUKAB STEWART

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