

Cross-Party Group on Human Trafficking

6.30 pm Tuesday 7 October 2025

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Rhoda Grant MSP

Invited guests

Linda Thompson (Women's Support Project)

Non-MSP Group Members

Annie Scott (UN House Scotland)

Esther Muschena (Parent Network Scotland)

Euan Fraser (Hope for Justice)

Iain Whyte (City of Edinburgh Council)

Janice Wilson (Soroptimist)

Joy Gillespie (SOHTIS)

Magnus C. Storvik (UN House Scotland)

Manon Gaudichet (UN House Scotland)

Michael Perera (Scottish Government)

Rebecca Wallace

Rhys Munro (UN House Scotland)

Sophie Gleisner (UN House Scotland)

Sally Jackson (FiliA)

Susan McKellar (Scottish Women's Convention)

Apologies

Bill Kidd MSP

Carola Eyber (Scottish Government)
Gordon Meldrum (Scottish Government)
Gordon Smith (Sapoe)
Matthew John (Scottish Government)

Adopt Minutes of the previous meeting

Accepted.

Presentation - Linda Thompson

Coordinator, Women's Support Project

Rhoda Grant MSP introduced Linda Thompson, National Coordinator at the Women's Support Project (WSP). Linda has led the organisation's work for 17 years, with a focus on tackling violence against women and supporting those affected by commercial sexual exploitation.

Linda began by outlining the purpose of the Women's Support Project and the key areas of its current work: improving service responses for women involved in selling sex, building capacity across frontline services, and ensuring that lived experience informs strategy and policy.

She presented the organisation's 2026 Election Manifesto, developed through consultation with frontline workers and women across Scotland. The manifesto aims to ensure that women affected by prostitution and sexual exploitation are visible in political debate and policymaking ahead of next year's election.

Key priorities include:

- Ending the criminalisation of women who sell sex and clearing any existing prostitution-related criminal records, so that women are not penalised for acts linked to exploitation.
- Strengthening accountability for perpetrators and exploiters, by enforcing and expanding existing legislation. WSP calls for the *Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007* to cover indoor settings, and for the *Criminal Law Consolidation (Scotland) Act* to be applied more rigorously against pimps and third parties who profit from exploitation.

- Investing in long-term, trauma-informed exiting services, to support women who wish to leave the sex industry. Linda noted that there are currently only four specialist services across Scotland, employing around fifteen staff in total. This leaves large parts of the country, including the Highlands and Islands, without access to dedicated support.
- Embedding prevention and partnership approaches, ensuring that mainstream services such as health, housing, and addiction support can identify and assist women at risk of exploitation.

Linda highlighted findings from WSP's *Encompass Snapshot*, which captures data from frontline services. It shows that:

- Around 75 percent of women involved in the sex industry experience physical violence.
- About 60 percent experience sexual assault, including rape.
- One in ten has faced attempted murder.

She stressed that these figures reflect violence committed by men purchasing sex, and that many women fear reporting such experiences due to stigma and the risk of criminalisation.

The manifesto builds on WSP's previous work, including the seven-phase model published between 2014 and 2017 and the 2021 report *What Next?*, both of which called for consistent messaging, workforce development, and a whole-systems approach to prevention.

Linda concluded by urging members to consider how the Cross-Party Group might use the period before the 2026 election to highlight these issues within party manifestos. She noted that, at present, no major party manifesto makes reference to women involved in the sex industry or to victims of human trafficking, and called for stronger alignment between national strategies on violence against women and human trafficking.

Date of Next Meeting

6.00 pm Tuesday 18 November 2025 (AGM)

