

Doncaster Star News
2nd December 2006

Vice blight

By David Kessen

Campaigners battling against prostitution claim the problem is returning to Doncaster's streets - despite a major police crackdown.

Residents in the Thorne Road area of Doncaster formed the pressure group Residents Against Street Prostitution (RASP) in September and have been working with police to clamp down on vice girls and kerb crawlers.

But today they claim the problems are back and say harsher action needs to be taken against those caught. Police gave residents a special hotline number so they could alert officers when girls were spotted. So far, officers have made 25 arrests since the crackdown started and issued cautions to 12 kerb crawlers. One has been to court and convicted. Officers have removed 123 women from the streets after being called out by residents.

RASP, which has more than 100 members, said the anti-vice campaign had success initially but the prostitutes were back and working around the clock.

Co-founder Sheila McIlwraith said: "Our members are regularly reporting prostitutes and kerb-crawlers but so few ever appear in court. Residents soon become disheartened if they feel the intelligence they are providing is being wasted."

Ron Cookson, another RASP committee member, claimed prostitutes and kerb crawlers had less than a one per cent chance of being taken to court.

RASP members complain when they try to pass on intelligence to the police vice hotline they are usually asked to leave a message or phone the police headquarters in Sheffield.

Mr Cookson added: "If you are able to speak to a police officer they are often too slow to react. By the time they turn up the prostitute has gone off with a client."

Police said they were surprised by the residents' reaction to the crackdown. Insp Darren Starkey said the policies in place for dealing with kerb crawlers and prostitutes were explained to RASP.

He said police applied for anti-social behaviour orders for kerb crawlers who had been convicted twice and prostitutes who had three convictions.

He said: "I am surprised perceptions are that the situation has worsened as our records indicate otherwise and RASP have been given an interim update on our progress so far."

"We have an agreed action plan that is held to scrutiny by members of the RASP committee with whom we meet regularly. We will continue to work with RASP and other agencies to tackle prostitution.

"The vice phone has been explained to residents at a previous meeting and it allows residents to inform us of prostitution-related intelligence.

"Anyone coming to Doncaster with the intention of kerb crawling is not welcome and anyone caught will be dealt with."