

PROSTITUTE CRACKDOWN

New approach aims to rid region's streets of vice girls

A NEW get-tough policy targeting South Yorkshire prostitutes could see the region's most prolific offenders jailed.

But prostitutes will have four chances to give up life on the game before being served with an ASBO, which could land them with a jail sentence if they breach it.

It's a new approach to the problem, which had previously seen prostitutes arrested by police, charged, fined and back on the streets the same day - working to pay off their penalty.

The new approach is the first time the police and other organisations committed to ridding Doncaster and Sheffield of their vice problems have

By Claire Lewis

agreed a protocol on how prostitution should be tackled.

They have put the emphasis on helping prostitutes move out of the sex industry and change their lives.

Every time a prostitute is found plying their trade they will be offered help and support to find a new way of making a living, by helping with a range of issues, such as drug addictions.

But the police are keen to enforce the law too and on the first two occasions a prostitute is found with a punter or touting for trade they will receive cautions.

The third and fourth times they

will be sent to court, but on the fifth occasion courts will be asked to issue them with an ASBO, which will set out a strict set of conditions they must comply with or risk jail.

Inspector Shaun Morley, of South Yorkshire Police Safer Neighbourhood Team, said: "Under the former system prostitutes were charged, fined and could be back on the streets again working to pay off their fines the same day. It wasn't working.

"Prostitutes are victims of society, often involved with drugs, who find themselves in a situation they feel they can't escape. But this protocol is aimed at giving them every opportunity to exit prostitution and to make

new lives for themselves by encouraging them to take advantage of all the mechanisms in place to help.

"It is the first time there has been a co-ordinated response to the problem where we all agree that helping to divert people away from prostitution is the best way forward in terms of finding a long-term solution."

He said police would continue to target kerb-crawlers to reduce the demand for prostitutes.

"If kerb-crawlers did not create the demand for prostitutes there would not be the number of women working," he added.

The first time kerb-crawlers are

caught they will be issued with an acceptable behaviour contract, which will be replaced with a stricter ASBO if they are caught with a vice girl for a second time.

On the third occasion courts will be asked to ban kerb-crawlers from driving to make it more difficult for them to visit red light districts.

Coun Jackie Drayton, of Sheffield's Prostitution Forum, said: "It is good that everyone is coming at the problem from the same direction, where helping women exit prostitution is

the main aim, because there are a lot of people out there able to help.

"I used to work as a careers adviser and I never came across anyone who wanted to grow up and become a prostitute - they tend to have been driven to it by circumstances beyond their control, such as being befriended by people who get them addicted to drugs.

"Getting to the root of everyone's problems and offering each individual help and support to turn their lives around has got to be a positive move."