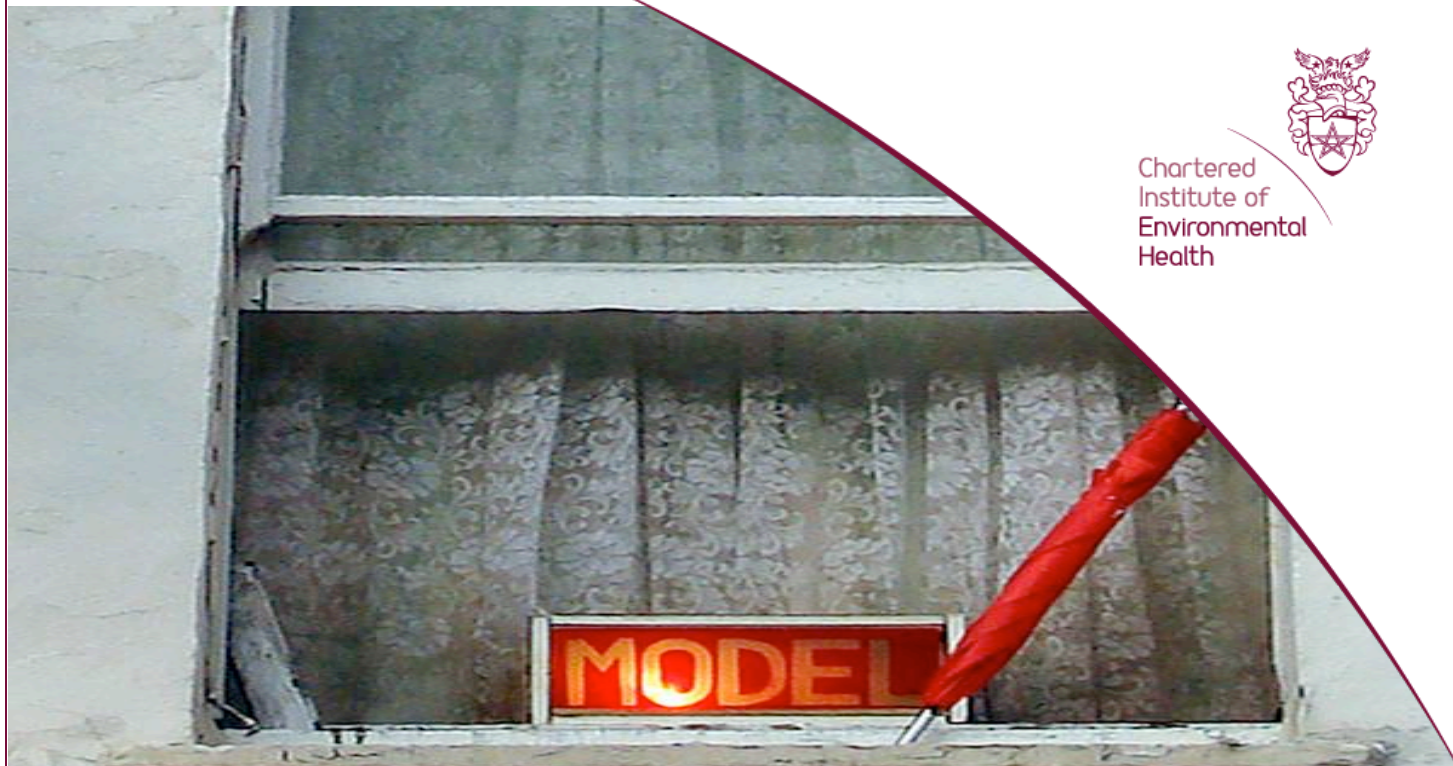




Chartered
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Policy briefing note - The regulation of the sex trade

In 2009 the CIEH was asked to support the licensing of brothels. This is not a subject commonly associated with environmental health, but it was considered relevant and within our professional remit for the following reasons:

- Preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is a public health issue of considerable importance
- We have previously campaigned on issues such as HIV and AIDs awareness and the need for public health interventions to control its spread
- Sex workers in practice have to operate outside the normal legal controls that protect their health and safety, and they are often at risk of violence, infection and worse.
- Environmental health practitioners working for councils are routinely involved in dealing with various aspects of community safety, antisocial behaviour and local environmental quality that are adversely affected by some parts of the sex industry
- Environmental health practitioners working for councils are often involved in a range of licensing and registration functions that can be associated with the sex industry – such as liquor licensing, late night entertainments, and sex establishments. In some areas these functions also include controlling massage parlours. In those areas where some form of “tolerated zone” has been attempted, the use of such powers has been particularly relevant.

In considering its policy, the CIEH consulted with a range of bodies and reviewed the experience of other countries that had attempted the licensing of brothels. It looked in detail at the last Government’s policy (“A Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy” issued in 2006.)

That strategy rejected any legalisation or decriminalisation. On brothel licensing the experience from elsewhere was that the good premises that caused few problems anyway sought to be licensed but others, including those with links to organised crime, did not. In all cases there had also been an increase in unlicensed brothels. The strategy did not accept that prostitution was inevitable. Reference was also made to the experience in Holland where organised crime had increased its foothold in the allowed ‘red light’ areas. The Swedish approach had been to put the criminalisation on those who buy sex, making all such purchasing illegal.

The CIEH recognises that the new Government is unlikely to adopt a stance that is significantly different. However the CIEH believes that a range of measures are needed that better protect sex workers, their clients and public health. It does not believe that the licensing of brothels is a measure by itself that would bring about these outcomes, and that this would leave unprotected key parts of the sex industry. The CIEH will therefore support other groups to seek better ways of protecting public health in this respect.