

## Scores of brothel girls trafficked to Plymouth, court told

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SCORES of girls were trafficked into Plymouth by a Chinese trio facing a host of sex trade charges, a court has heard.

Prosecutor Anthony Donne QC told the court how "demoralised" girls were taken to five brothels in the UK run by Feng Jiang and her partner Lei Zhang, some telling police they had been in the UK a matter of weeks.

Jiang, aged 32, has admitted her part in running a brothel in the city but denies any involvement in four others elsewhere in the country.

She has appeared at Plymouth Crown Court to stand trial alongside Zhang, 33, and another man, 50-year-old Chun Hung Lau. Mr Donne told the jury that the couple had run a "chicken house" from a house in St Dunstan's Terrace, St Judes, with a revolving door of prostitutes ferried to and from the small house from other parts of the country.

They were in the process of creating a 'mega-brothel' in East London when police swooped the Plymouth address in January last year, Mr Donne said.

He told the jury of five men and seven women how the couple were laundering hundreds of thousands of pounds profit through an 'off-the-shelf' company called Diligent Trading Ltd, based in London's Docklands area.

Lau, a family man from Lake View Drive, Tamerton Foliot, had acted as the company's secretary, the court heard.

Mr Donne said: "These places are known as chicken houses.

"The prostitutes are normally girls and women who operate willingly, often to earn money to send to their families in the Far East.

"They travel from brothel to brothel and usually stay no more than a week in each.

"The money is usually split 50/50 between prostitute and brothel-keeper."

The court heard how Jiang had arrived in the country in June 2001 on a student visa, although Home Office investigations showed she never enrolled.

Zhang also came to the country as a student, in September 2002, and sometimes used the name Kevin.

The couple, both of Shandy Street, London, started renting the terraced house in St Judes in November 2003, telling landlords they were students at the University of Plymouth.

In October 2006 police installed covert CCTV cameras outside the property, Mr Donne said, spotting up to six men a day making half-hour visits.

On January 17 last year an undercover police officer named Chrissy dialled a number advertising 'oriental massages' and arranged to visit the house.

He was taken upstairs and offered sex – for a fee – by a girl who told him she had arrived in the UK from Hong Kong two months ago, and in Plymouth just two or three days earlier, the court heard.

Later that day police executed a search warrant and Jiang opened the door.

Officers found a mobile phone with text messages detailing train journeys, Mr Donne said, a

well as notepads and other paperwork detailing brothel charges, and leading police to other addresses that Jiang and Zhang allegedly operated from.

They are jointly charged with keeping, managing, acting in or assisting in the management of five brothels.

Zhang denies any involvement in the St Judes operation.

The other venues, which both have pleaded not guilty to, are alleged to have been at Church Road and Redhills, both in Exeter, Richmond Hill, in Truro, and Bishops Way, in Bethnal Green, London. Mr Donne told the jury that all the addresses had been let to Zhang.

One client, known only as Mr P, went to their Truro brothel on two occasions, he said.

"He said the girls looked demoralised," Mr Donne told the court. "On his second visit he was concerned about the girls' condition that he phoned the police."

He said the couple were planning a 'mega-brothel' in Shoreditch High Street, in East London when police finally stepped in.

Jiang and Zhang have also pleaded not guilty to controlling prostitution for gain between March 1, 2004, and January 17, 2007, and people trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Jiang has admitted one count of converting the proceeds of brothel keeping and controlling prostitutes, which Zhang and Lau have both denied.

Lau has pleaded not guilty to a further charge of obtaining a money transfer of £165,000 by deception on May 31, 2005.

The trial, which is expected to last at least five weeks, continues.



ACCUSED: From left are Lei Zhang, Feng Jiang and Chun Hung L