

**Bristol Fawcett Public Forum Statement to Bristol City Council**  
**Licensing Committee, 23/11/2011**

Bristol Fawcett, established in 2001, is a Bristol-based organisation whose members support the aims of the Fawcett Society. Fawcett's vision is of a society where women and our rights and freedoms are equally valued and respected and where we have equal power and influence in shaping our own lives and our wider world. Bristol Fawcett works at a local level to bring an informed gender equality perspective to local decision making bodies. We do this in the context of the recent report "Enabling Women's Voice and Influence in Bristol" (March 2011) which found that 92% of questionnaire respondents said no or were unsure when asked whether decision makers in the city take full account of women's equality issues.

We understand that the purpose of this meeting is to decide on an appropriate number of SEVs in each of the localities in which an SEV application has been received. This decision is being taken before the applications are being considered and, consequently, before the numerous objections to the applications from those living and working in the area are acknowledged.

Today in this building Bristol City Council are hosting an international conference on gendered violence. This Friday is the UN International Day for the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This week the Safer Bristol Partnership launches its strategy on tackling VAWG in which licensing is specifically referenced. This time last year Bristol City Council invited responses to its draft licensing policy for SEVs. You heard from, among others: Bristol Fawcett - whose remit is gender equality; Rape Crisis - who are experts in working with victims of rape and sexual violence as well as in educating about sexual VAWG; Bristol University's Centre for Gender and Violence Research - which is an internationally renowned body of experts in analysing the causes of gender based violence; and the office of the Director for Public Health at NHS Bristol - which oversees education programmes aiming to change and challenge patterns of behaviour, because the NHS deals with the fallout of VAWG in our city. The costs to the public purse of dealing with VAWG in our city, as outlined in Bristol's strategy being launched this week, are massive. The impact on the NHS and on council services is enormous. Taking domestic violence alone, which is just one element of VAWG, the estimated financial cost to the public purse in Bristol in one year is nearly 49 million pounds.

All the experts who you heard from set out the negative impact that lapdancing clubs have on women and girls<sup>1</sup>. Of those responses that addressed the question of appropriate numbers of SEVs in Bristol, all recommended that a cap of zero in all localities would be the right approach for Bristol to take.

Please note that we are specifically addressing SEVs in particular and are not objecting to sex establishments in general terms.

Today you have before you a report from the Police which supplies the number of reported offences in the localities surrounding the 4 current SEVs. The supplementary data state that sexual and violent crime against women increased by 82% within 50m of SEVs from 2008/09 to 2010/11 – that is double the rate of increase in other areas not within 50m of a SEV. You will know that government data tell us that only 3 in 20 rapes are ever reported to the police – so in fact the numbers, shocking as they are, are in reality going to be even worse. Sexual assault should not be something that the women of Bristol put up with as a matter of course, but at the moment they do, and are unlikely to go to the police. You will not know, because you have not seen any of the objections sent in to the licence applications yet, that women have given shocking reports of the harassment they have experienced outside Bristol lapdancing clubs, experiences which are rarely reported if ever and which include being followed home from the areas around lapdancing clubs and assaulted. Women also put up with verbal abuse and harassment. Women fear for their safety and wellbeing in city streets. The Royal Town Planning Institute guide on Gender and Spatial Planning says that “lap dancing and exotic dancing clubs make women feel threatened or uncomfortable”.

Many of the objections sent to the council, including ours and those from residents and places of worship, set out detailed points which refer to the inappropriateness of localities on many and sometimes all of the relevant considerations listed in the council’s policy. We do not propose to set out the long list of reasons why each location is inappropriate although, as we understand the objections have not been presented to the licensing committee, it would be fair to do so. By way of just one example, Urban Tiger is located on the “Centre Promenade” of Bristol which is described by the council as the city’s main bus and pedestrian travel hub, seeing 600 vehicles, 100 buses, 400 cyclists and 1,300 pedestrians per hour, in addition to being where the city’s flagship theatre is located. We hope that the committee has seen maps of all residential, leisure, education, tourist, faith, family friendly, and retail premises in each locality, if there is any doubt in any member’s mind about the inappropriate nature of each of these localities for an SEV.

We note that where a nil cap is decided upon, there is no right of appeal to a Magistrates’ Court. This protects the council against a potentially significant impact on the council’s resources in terms of litigation. We also note that in Newcastle this year a locality was deemed appropriate by the Licensing Committee and in the subsequent two weeks no fewer than 7 new applications were received for SEVs to open in that appropriate locality.

Finally, we note that a policy decision to grant no SEV licences does not in any way prevent an existing premises from continuing to operate as a business - licensed for the sale of alcohol, consumption of food and contribution to the night time economy, but simply without offering lapdancing.

<sup>i</sup> Research evidence referenced in submissions to the Licensing Committee and in the Roundtable on Commercial Sexualisation includes:

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See also

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