

This briefing was prepared to assist Camden Council when challenged by a local strip club over its ban on private areas. We were asked to focus on evidence of sexual contact in private areas of strip clubs but we have also included other relevant issues.

This is a dynamic document that will be regularly updated.

If you have relevant information, we'd love to hear from you!

Please contact us at no@notbuyingit.org.uk

And, of course, please feel free to use the contents of this document and share widely.

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Background

In 2017, a Camden strip club (Red Rooms), intent on an entire floor of 'private booths' took Camden Council to Court over its licensing ban on private areas. The Court allowed into evidence oral statements from the club operator and written statements from performers that the club 'was well run' and that 'nothing untoward' did, or would, take place. The Court ruled that the club should be allowed private areas - overturning Council policy in the process. The Council is now appealing this decision at a higher, Crown, Court.

Concerns over Ruling

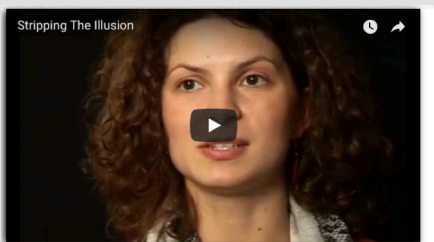
1. Legislation clearly allows Councils to put restrictions on the layout of strip clubs and refuse licenses if its conditions are not met ¹.
2. The club appealing this decision had apparently been in breach of Council's 'no private area' restriction for years and yet had not had its license revoked.
3. By allowing an appeal against a ban on 'private booths' (or similar), this judge is in effect overturning Council Policy.
4. Council policy that was arrived at after considerable consultation and adherence to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) by which Councils are legally bound.
5. That would then suggest that council policy can quite readily be overturned.
6. We question the credentials of the judge, in particular his understanding of the strip industry – not least because it is widely known that performers are intimidated by management and have even been coerced into signing statements of support.
7. The Courts, just like Local Authorities, are legally bound to consider the PSED ². How has this Court abided by the PSED in making this decision?
8. We would also point out that it is extremely hard, indeed triggering, for women who are in the industry to provide testimonies against it, especially in a formal environment like a court that may not be sympathetic. They may also fear industry-wide retaliation from the many clubs they tend to work in. At very least they are likely to be out of a job. Even women who have left the industry still feel threatened and intimidated by it.
9. If undue wait is placed on direct witness statements there is therefore inherent bias in the proceedings

¹ Home Office Guidance to Strip Club (SEV) Legislation, Section 3.28 (d) (iii)
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100408140149/http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/crimereduction057a.pdf>

² Technical Guidance Notes on the PSED, Section 1.9:
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/technical_guidance_on_the_psed_england.pdf

Sources of Evidence of Sexual Contact

Key Sources of Evidence:



- **VIDEO** by Object:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=FsC8xfG2iTw

- **Dispatches:** <http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/dispatches/the+hidden+world+of+lap+dancing/2483062.html>
In this documentary undercover reporters visited approximately a dozen clubs. In all of these performers were much closer than 3 foot with every performance culminating in performers straddling punters' laps and grinding up and down on their crotch.
- **Jennifer Danna's Book 'Stripped'**
- **Julie Bindel Research 'Profitable Exploits'** ⁷
One of the most comprehensive research studies carried out in the UK
- **Testimonies from Performers**
Gathered by Object, journalists, researchers and others. Cited extensively here
- **Recent Evidence from Clubs** ³

Note

Most research into the industry was conducted some years ago, however, more recent reports suggest nothing has changed:

A simple google search of recent press articles exposes yet again the universality of sexual contact, harassment and even assault of dancers. We have found reports of **8 incidences** alone reported in 2016-2017 **deemed so severe club licenses were suspended**. And this just represents the tip of the iceberg ³

Indeed as Julie Bindel who has researched this field extensively points out:

My research .. found evidence in the clubs that the VIP suites, available for customers wishing to have "one-to-one" time with a dancer away from the public areas, are used as brothels. In the 13 years since my research was published, little appears to have changed. ⁶

And why would it? The attitudes by customers have not changed, the exploitative working conditions that coerce performers to accept, or carry out, touching and other sexual acts has not changed, the operators have not changed.

A change in licensing regime has meant little in many areas – Local Councils, like Camden, with a 'zero policy' still have some 6 pre-existing clubs to which this policy appears not to apply. In fact the only change has been years of austerity and a worsening economy, making performers that more desperate and vulnerable to exploitation, customers with less money expecting more and club operators needing to provide 'as full a service as possible' in order to still turn a hefty profit.

³ Recent Evidence of Rule Breaking: www.notbuyingit.org.uk/StripClubsRecent

Evidence of Sexual Contact & Harassment

Research Evidence

Researchers who interviewed numerous performers in-depth drew the following conclusions:

'It was clear to me, after visiting six of the clubs, that many owners and managers create a context in which the buying and selling of sexual services would be likely to happen. Club owners tend to absolve themselves of any responsibility if sexual services are found to be on offer, or being arranged on the premises, yet at the same time the dancers are encouraged to project an air of sexual availability to customers.'⁶

Problems identified by the dancers interviewed ranged from threats of physical violence from customers and demands for sex, to practical health and safety issues.⁷

Dancers had a range of personal safety tips learnt through experience which they felt would benefit new dancers⁴

Security was felt to be inadequate in all six clubs [this includes Spearmint Rhino, Camden]. All four Glasgow clubs allowed the 'no touching' rule to be broken.⁷

None of the clubs/pub visited for this study fully adhered to the terms of their licences with evidence of bodily contact and sexual services being offered and/or requested noted in some clubs.⁷

Approximately half of the customers in Glasgow went to clubs looking for sex. Four (25%) claimed they had had sex with a dancer on the premises⁷

Indeed sexual harassment is a universal feature of strip clubs:

In the US strip scene, drawing on interviews with eighteen strippers [it was] found that all the dancers had suffered verbal harassment, and both physical and sexual abuse whilst working. [It] also found that all the women had been propositioned for prostitution, and that three-quarters had been stalked by men associated with the strip club.⁷

Recent Incidences

There are numerous recent incidences of rule breaking, sexual assault and even prostitution and trafficking on site at clubs UK wide.³ :

Angels, Leicester, closed in 2016 after touching and fondling viewed on CCTV

Jack of Diamonds, Bristol, closed 2017 for inappropriate touching.

Hanley's, Staffordshire, finally closed in 2017 after years of concerns over inappropriate touching and offers of prostitution

Bing, West Bromwich, shut down 2017 in part because of concerns over prostitution

⁴ Teela Sanders et al http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/research/Regulatory_Dance/FINALSUMMARYjan2012.pdf

Testimonies from Performers



By Yvetta T.

Posted on 16/09/2014

I have worked on and it is full of girls who don't speak English, The staff are rude verbally abusive some of the girls will do drugs while at work and other extra services outside of the club one member of staff Particually is very abusive Will attack customers physically and verbally as well as dances such as my self. Avoid this club at all costs

As performers testify:

'The fact is that if you break the rules, you make more money. If one dancer starts breaking the rules then the pressure is on others to do the same. Otherwise a bloke would think, Well, that dancer charged me £20 and stayed three feet away, but that one charged me just the same and she put her breasts in my mouth and sat on my crotch' ⁵

'you learn that certain things are profitable, and no contact is the first rule you learn to break. Eventually you start to wonder, what is the difference between me and a prostitute?' ⁵

'The 3ft rule is a joke. You pay someone to get naked and then grind away on your crotch' ⁸

'It is about sexual stimulation, whatever the clubs say - and it is physical' ⁸

'If a girl is having sex for £5, the other girls get really pissed off because they then have to do it for £5...and if one girl in a strip club is having sex, the others have to do it to make money.' ⁵

'A lot of men are totally blunt .. 'How much for a blowjob?' Sometimes men try to persuade you to go back to their houses or to a hotel room for sex. There's a lot of blurring of the understanding of what it is you're supposed to be doing and whether you're actually a prostitute.' ⁵

'The clubs maintain a veneer of no touching, but touching is more standard than not ... If I had a boyfriend now and he said he was going to a lap-dancing club, I would consider it to be infidelity.' ⁵

Testimony from Legal Representative of Strip Club:

Bristol City Licensing Committee: "You genuinely believe that in order to carry out your business of lap dancing there has to be touching?"

Lawyer for Bristol Lap Dancing Club at recent License Hearing: "Correct .. by definition a lap dance is a type of sex work"

⁵ Rachel Bell <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/19/gender.uk>

'Testimony' from Punter Forums:

Punters forums are a rich source of insight into illegal activities at clubs, alongside the attitudes of club clientele.

There are numerous message boards used by male customers with threads dedicated to asking for tips on which clubs men can "get extras" or describing, often in graphic detail, the 'extras' they have received ⁶:

peoffrey said: ↑

A big mucky night out in a different place (Sheffield for me) and a accompanied by a trusted friend did the trick. I'd come in to some money and ended up blowing a wad in Spearmint Rhino. One bigger boobed Jessica Ennis lookalike earned some decent wage waving her Jack and Danny in my face too. I began dating again some six months later. There's been no girl like it since but I remain the eternal optimist.

I've just remembered that I tipped her extra and she let me lick her tit.

peoffrey, 4 Mar 2016



By Paul J.

Posted on 24/08/2013

nice club,none of the girls talk english,love the dog behind the bar,if you like snail trail on your legs come here,£50 she said she would meet me after work,anyone being offered to go here must avoid

4 out of 5 Stars



Connor Hardy — Some girl took me upstairs for specials gave me the shiteast dance ever and asked for £30 to lick her fanny didn't do that so got money back

August 15, 2015 · 8 Reviews

Like · Comment 3

⁶ Julie Bindel <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/britains-lap-dancing-clubs-must-be-shut-down-once-all-1620883>

According to Researchers

My research .. found evidence in the clubs that the VIP suites, available for customers wishing to have "one-to-one" time with a dancer away from the public areas, are used as brothels.⁶

Services on offer, according to several dancers and customers in both the Glasgow and London clubs, include complimentary champagne, continual 'intimate' dancing for up to one hour, comfortable sofas for the customers, chatting and, according to one customer in a Glasgow club, "full sex for £200".⁷

Risks to dancers safety and health were seen as; assaults .. harassment in the booth areas of the clubs⁴

According to Performers

Over 50% of dancers reported having received harassment 'lots of times' or a 'a few times', nearly half reported frequent verbal harassment and unwanted touching from customers. This was reported more widely in clubs with private dancing than those with only stage shows.⁴

Private Booths: many dancers felt that the way in which private booths were set up also made them vulnerable and also allowed standards to be lowered by dancers offering more than is allowed in the dances.⁴

According to the Police

Legs 11, Birmingham, had its license suspended in 2017 with under cover officers being offered sexual services in private rooms.³

"From a police perspective it would make life and enforcement easier if we did not have the VIP rooms"
Police Officer⁷Error! Bookmark not defined.

"If anything's going to go wrong, it will be in the VIP or private rooms. You have to trust the integrity of the person who is in charge of security, but you can never be sure a blind eye is not going to be turned. Most venues have a VIP room, because it promotes intrigue to the customer who will go there and maybe look for something more, because of the secrecy" Police Officer⁷

According to Club Management

"We have curtains that are drawn around the pole. You can see through it, but it gives the customer the illusion that it's a private dance, but it absolutely isn't. There is only one reason why you have a cubicle. It's because touching is going on and all sorts" manager of Club Crème, Bristol⁷

⁷ Julie Bindel Profitable Exploits <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=8107&>

Feeling Intimidated by Club Operators

Many women simply will not speak out publically against the industry whilst in it:

In relation to lap dancing, several journalists .. have confirmed that the conduct of staff, dancers and customers is affected when they are aware they are being observed ⁷:

'Without exception, when first asked how the customers behaved towards them, the dancers would be very positive about them, but later in the conversation would admit to a variety of problems' ⁷

'All three [performers] insist that I use their dance names. Two of them tell me that this is to avoid upsetting their parents. The family of the third knows full well what she does, but still: she would rather not tell me her real name.'⁷

'I found that no one except the management, who were excited by the idea of newspaper coverage, wanted to talk to me, and I was viewed with suspicion. Everything seemed controlled, and I had a sense that I was not seeing the true picture.'⁸

This can be so extreme that even when performers have been potentially assaulted by club operators they still will not talk, even to the police ³:

When a performer was dragged out on to the street by management, drunk, half naked and unconscious, she refused to talk to police even though this incident was so severe that the club's license was immediately suspended.

It can extend beyond performers to those researching the industry, as this journalist attested:

'for the record, one club owner telephoned me after our meeting and made what I took to be a veiled threat'⁸

Even Women who have *left* the industry *still* feel intimidated

"The shadowy world behind some clubs is not something that you would want to go up against" ⁵

"I'd rather not say what I am doing these days, for the same reason that I won't tell you my real name. These are people [the club owners] you don't want to mess with. I am genuinely afraid of them. Who knows exactly what goes on behind the scenes, but I'd still rather not mess with it." ⁸

Self Worth and the Normalising of Harassment and Coercion

Performers entire sense of self worth becomes wrapped up in the industry, so to admit even to yourself that anything untoward might be going on becomes unthinkable. At the same time touching, harassment and sexual services become so normalised that it almost does not register:

'These women, as you would expect, are keen to defend the work they do and furious that what they regard as patronising feminists seem bent on turning them into sex workers.'⁸

".. for a time, it is possible to convince yourself that everything is OK. "No one in the club would express any uncertainty about what they are doing - they're too busy competing for work - so even if you do feel bad about it, you wonder if you are the only one. You convince yourself that your perception of what the job would be like is the same as what the job is, even though there is a quite weird gap between the two. It's only when you have made the decision to leave that you realise how insane it all was."⁸

Why Operators Might Suggest There is No Rule Breaking

It seems extraordinary that a judge has taken into evidence assurances from club operators that their venue is well-run with no breaking of rules, particularly given the type of men who tend to operate strip clubs³. There is obviously huge vested interest for club operators to assert that their venues are properly run. At the same time, operators will invariably point the finger at each other to suggest that every strip club other than their own is operating illicitly:

All club owners interviewed accused other club owners of running disreputable clubs offering sexual services.⁷

It should be noted that when it was first suggested that strip clubs should be licensed as part of the sex industry, operators came out in their droves to proclaim that lap dancing 'wasn't sexual'. A major representative of the industry (Simon Warr, owner of Spearmint Rhino UK) even asserted this at a Select Committee Hearing of the Department of Culture Media and Sport^{8,9}. This again points to the total unreliability of statements of strip club operators.

In addition, operating under conditions coercive to rule breaking whilst 'turning a blind eye' makes it easy for management to claim they had no idea that anything untoward was happening.

Clearly statements from management require a large salt seller and cannot be used in evidence.

⁸ Rachel Cooke <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/mar/08/sex-industry-lap-dancing>

⁹ Object Lap Dancing Facts <http://notbuyingit.org.uk/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Lap%20Dancing.pdf>

In Summary

Everything about the operation of strip/lap dancing clubs is conducive to rule breaking. Take for example the employment practices used: Unlike other workers at strip clubs (bar staff, bounders) dancers are deemed 'self employed' and have no employment rights. They pay a fee to work in the clubs, they must give a portion of takings to the club. They must buy expensive 'house clothes'. They are fined at every opportunity (eg tardiness, 'not smiling enough'). They have to buy their own drinks (a necessity for most to get through the night). Some even pay retainers on days they do not work. So performers are in debt before they even start work and can even accumulate it as they work.

Club operators also ensure far too high a ratio of performers to punters to ensure the illusion of 'infinite choice'. And, of course, they also make money off each dancer from fees, retainers, house clothes, fines as described above. This makes competition for customers' wallets intense. Dancers only make £20 for a full lap dance. This puts immeasurable pressure on performers to 'provide extra services', particularly when that is the expectation of customers and the impression provided by operators. The minute one performer succumbs and provides these services, the pressure on all the others to follow is overwhelming. Clearly private areas greatly increase this pressure and the risk of rule breaking.

The Role of Management

a number of factors contribute to the possibility of the dancers being pressurised into offering, or agreeing to, sexual services without direct instruction from management ⁷

the clubs [are] run in a way that implicitly encourages the customers to expect and seek sexual services from the dancers ⁷

It can be concluded, from the body of evidence that some lap dance club owners and managers create conditions in which prostitution is likely to occur ⁷

So long as club managers assure the police and others that any dancer found to be offering or engaging in sexual services will be dismissed, places the onus for behaviour onto the dancer. There has been a tendency, as highlighted through tribunals and police evidence, that club owners who either encourage dancers to engage in sexual activity, or merely 'turn a blind eye' are not held responsible for allowing that to happen. ⁷

Customer Attitudes and Expectations

This statement into a comprehensive study into lap dancing personifies the attitudes of customers ⁷:

'the men who approached the researcher were all looking for a 'date', and all inferred, in various ways, the possibility of 'free' sex. For example, one said: "It's a relief to know there are birds here who might not charge you.'

Several of the dancers in this study stated that a number of customers assume they will agree to provide sexual services.

Common complaints from performers about customers included:


- Trying to grab the women during private dances
- Asking for sexual services
- Touching their own genitals

A study of customers of strip clubs found that over half of the men interviewed stated that their motivation for visiting lap dancing clubs was to escape from what they perceived as a 'code of conduct' which 'restrained' them.¹⁰


Or as expressed by this customer¹¹: "You can go in there and shop for a piece of meat , quote unquote, so to speak".

Or on this punter notice board⁶: 'With all this sexual harassment stuff going around these days, men need somewhere to go where they can act like they want' Punter Comment.

Indeed, comments on Punter Forums give a very clear insight into the attitudes of strip club visitors¹²:

 « Reply #7 on: September 07, 2014, 10:26:54 am »

Just book a WG that you really like who can do lap dances and get her to perform before the real action starts. Perhaps book her and confirm that's the scenario you want? It actually sounds good that I may give it a whirl. I was at a lap dance bar on Friday and may aim to recreate a few scenes where I can touch...and more!!!

 « on: September 06, 2014, 08:48:10 am »

Hi guys,

I wondered if anyone had any recommendations for a good strip club in London... Any that do extras would be great, but even just a good one that had friendly hotels and good atmosphere would work too

Extreme Customer Attitudes – Assaults

Harassment can be so bad that it leads to violence and even assault³

Cleopatra's Lounge, Huddersfield 2016: Punter smashes club window when dancer refuses to meet up with him.

Bentley's, Doncaster, 2017: Performer assaulted outside club after refusing sex with punter.

X in the City, Liverpool, 2015: Lap dancer assaulted after refusing to give oral sex in a private booth.

¹⁰ Journal of Sex Research 40:1, 61-75 (2004)

¹¹ "Just trying to relax": Masculinity, masculinizing practices, and strip club regulars". Journal of Sex Research 40:1, 61-75 (2003)

¹² <https://www.ukpunting.com/index.php?topic=37642.0>

More Rule Breaking: Videoing of Performers

Illegal videoing of performers by punters is increasingly common and near-impossible to monitor. Clubs do not have a license for this. Additionally this could be viewed as a form of 'revenge porn', particularly as many performers do not want their identifies revealed through exposure on the internet.

It is self-evident that private booths or similar greatly facilitates such illegal videoing.