



# **BRISTOL SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT VENUES (SEVS) POLICY REVIEW**

## **PREPARED BY**

*Safe and Equal Bristol,  
in collaboration with Bristol Women's Commission*

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## Overview

# A PROPOSED NIL-CAP ON SEVS IN BRISTOL

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Safe and Equal Bristol, Bristol Women's Commission and other women's organisations want to make Bristol a fair and equal city that does not tolerate violence against women and girls.

**A proposed nil-cap on Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) is one way in which Bristol City Council can embed gender equality into policy and deliver on this aim.**

The decision was taken in 2011 by the administration's then Licensing Committee to introduce a 'cap' of three SEVs. Bristol currently has two licensed SEVs (both recently re-licensed for another year despite heavy opposition) and a consultation on the proposed nil-cap is now underway, due to finish next month.

Modern evidence-led policy approaches and public campaigns have emphasised the importance of addressing the attitudes and harmful social norms that underpin both gender inequality and men's violence against women and girls.

In recent months, the **epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence** has gained increasing prominence as a social crisis and political concern and **urgent action is needed.**

Gender equality campaigners, violence against women prevention experts and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence support the nil-cap, along with city leaders including MPs, the Mayor of Bristol and the previous Police and Crime Commissioner.

**SEVs are sexist. They promote, and profit from, harmful sexist attitudes that pave the way for male violence against women and girls. They exploit the economic instability of women and obstruct progress towards equality between women and men. Their equality impact, which is negative, cannot be mitigated.**

A number of authorities have recognised this and successfully taken a 'nil cap' approach. If Bristol were to implement this policy, it would be the largest city in the UK to do so and others may follow.

The full report provides a detailed overview of the policy and legal framework and the evidence base in support of the council's draft policy that no SEV licenses should ordinarily be granted within the local authority area. This summary report outlines some of the key points the council's Licensing Committee **must** consider when making its decision.



*The wider policy context*

# TACKLING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A nil-cap policy would help Bristol City Council meet its obligations and objectives in law and policy to promote equality and address violence and discrimination by tackling the sexist culture that can, and does, lead to male violence against women and girls.

Male violence against women and girls is an epidemic: a **public health crisis** and a **human rights issue**. 2021 reports from Ofsted, ONS and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue reconfirm the extent of the problem. Bristol's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment showed that sexual violence and harassment was significantly higher in Bristol than in England as a whole.

**Sexual objectification of women and girls and male sexual violence are consistently associated with each other. SEVs promote and profit from this and stand in the way of gender equality.**

This is **not** about individual choices, but is about public policy that is consistent with the city's wider equality strategy.

Citizens of Sheffield were successful in two separate Judicial Review applications against Sheffield City Council for their failure to meet their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty regarding the impact of SEVs on gender equality.

## WHO CONSIDERS SEVS HARMFUL?

- *Bristol women's groups, including Bristol Women's Voice & Bristol Women's Commission*
- *Charities supporting survivors, including NextLink and SARSAS (formerly Bristol Rape Crisis)*
- *Mayor of Bristol Marvin Rees*
- *Previous Mayor of Bristol, George Ferguson*
- *Previous Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon & Somerset Police, Sue Mountstevens*
- *Bristol MPs*
- *St Stephens Church*
- *Residents living near the existing SEVs*
- *Victims of street harassment outside the existing SEVs*
- *Many more women and girls in Bristol*

## ...AND WHO SAYS THEY'RE NOT

- *SEV owners & some current performers*
- *Sex industry lobbyists & sex worker rights activists*
- *Some sex buyers*
- *Some consultation respondents, including those told, untruthfully, that a nil-cap = deregulation*

*Joining the dots*

# HOW SEVS HARM WOMEN AS A GROUP

**The nil-cap proposal is not based on 'case specific' harm to individual women, but the wider harm towards women and girls as a group.**

The council has a responsibility to implement policies which help prevent crime and disorder, not just crimes that go reported. We know that crimes both directly linked to SEVs and sexual harassment and violence against women are underreported and do not appear in official crime statistics.

**SEVs promote harmful attitudes to women** and run counter to promoting equality between women and men. They **reproduce and promote the existing financial and social inequality between women and men** in our society, and **reinforce the prevailing cultural assumption that women's bodies are objects to which men are entitled to have access.**

This is not about individual women working in SEVs today, but a longterm strategy for women and girls, as well as men and boys, who are negatively impacted now by the culture of sexism promoted by SEVs, and will continue to experience the impact of today's sexist culture for years to come - unless the council's Licensing Committee implements a nil-cap.

**Some examples:**

- A recent study found that men who want to dominate women, but are required to work for female bosses, react by sexually objectifying women in an attempt to reinforce the sexist gender hierarchy that they prefer. **SEVs advertise themselves as suitable venues for office parties and corporate entertaining.** An Employment Tribunal found that: "The use of lap dancing clubs by colleagues, and the company's conduct in acquiescing to that conduct, amounted to sexual harassment".
- Young women and female students are the most frequently victimised members of the population for sexual assaults and attempts including rape, with some studies showing young girls in school uniform are a particular target. Most men who buy sex start before the age of 21. **SEVs in Bristol have previously run "Back to School" and "Student" promotions targeted at male students as customers, and female students for the purpose of recruitment; along with "school girl" promotions featuring strippers in school uniform.**



*SEVs promote & profit from*

# SEXIST ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOUR

In the largest ever multinational study of male violence against women published United Nations in 2013, **70-80 percent of men who had raped reported that they believed they had the right to sex.** The second most frequently reported motivation was related to entertainment-seeking. Sexual Entertainment Venues reinforce this male entitlement.

"Alcohol use intensifies the objectification of women in a manner that increases sexual violence risk". SEVs sell alcohol and encourage sexual objectification, which has established links with sexual violence.

Male domestic violence offenders using the sex industry (including strip clubs) use more forms of aggressive violence and more controlling behaviours than those who do not use the sex industry.

Men who are sex buyers are significantly more likely (15%) than non-sex buyers (2%) to report that they would force a woman to have sex, or rape a woman, if they could get away with it.

**"I endured my worst experience of street-based sexual harassment outside Central Chambers. I was walking past the venue, and a group of men gathered outside shouted at me "drop your knickers". I ignored them and went to carry on walking. In response, the men chanted in unison "bitch, bitch, bitch" as I was forced to walk past them. I was very shaken by the experience and started to cry...being sexually mocked, and then having sexual insults chanted at you as you try to walk home, is deeply upsetting."**

- victim testimony of sexual harassment outside SEV

## WHAT STRIP CLUB PUNTERS SAY...

- *"With all of this sexual harassment stuff going around these days, men need somewhere to go where they can act like they want"*
- *"Fine females, like being in a butchers with prime rump on display".*
- *"It's a power thing really – being able to get a woman to give you sexual services by handing over money".*
- *"You are the boss and get what you want"*
- *"Women are becoming more domineering in the workplace and I think a lot of guys like to have power over women."*

## WHAT STRIPPERS HAVE SAID.....

- *"They'll say, "Turn around bitch, I want to see your ass. I'm paying."*
- *"It's screwed up my view of men. Everytime I see a man now, I just see him as a punter. There's only so many bad experiences you can have before you start hating them all"*
- *"We were encouraged to act like little girls, lost demure, submissive and dumb, which is what makes men part with money quickest."*



*Summary*

# SEVS HAVE NO PLACE IN OUR CITY

**This is a critical time in the fight for women's safety. There are more than 220,000 women and girls who live in Bristol, whose welfare is the Council's concern.**

The nil-cap proposal has been a decade in the offing and has taken Bristol City Council's Licensing Committee til 2021 - in the midst of an epidemic of male violence against women and girls - to get to the point of public consultation, despite repeated calls from city leaders and women's charities.

**The widespread harm from SEVs comes from their perpetuation of sexism and violence against women as a group.**

People are sexist and violent when harmful attitudes to women and sexist social norms encouraged in some environments such as SEVs are allowed to thrive and are treated as normal. That is what is happening here.

The city's own experience is of moving from five to two venues with no evidence at all of an upsurge in more dangerous, unregulated SEV-style activity involving lap-dancers or strippers, or indeed of a rise in recorded crimes associated with any such imagined activity.

**The UK study undertaken in 2011 found that the industry was fuelled by the supply of performers, not by a demand for performances. Therefore a business that recruits and trains performers and advertises their services, is fuelling demand.**

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council has legal obligations to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment of women, and to advance equality of opportunity for women as well as to foster good relations between men and women. The Council's Licensing Committee **has to** engage with these aims when developing its new SEV policy.

**The appropriate number of SEVs in any area where women and men are valued equally and where gendered violence is not tolerated is ZERO. A nil-cap is needed to achieve this.**

Women and girls of Bristol - particularly young women targeted for recruitment in SEVs - have no chance of being social equals with men and boys while our city gives the go-ahead to institutionalised sexism, which is the core business of SEVs.

**TO READ THE FULL REPORT, SEE: [BIT.LY/SEVREPORT2021](https://bit.ly/SEVREPORT2021)**