

From: National SEV Coalition
To: [Sharon Davies](#); [Kelly Guy](#)
Subject: Regarding the Public Consultation on SEVs - a Submission
Date: 04 June 2021 15:18:08

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Dear Sharon Davies, Kelly Guy and other members of the Blackpool Licensing Committee,

We, the National SEV Coalition, are writing to you regarding the proposed nil cap on SEV licenses in Blackpool.

Our group is composed of str*ppers and ex-str*ppers from all over the UK. We oppose discrimination against str*pping, str*ppers and s*x workers in general. We are deeply concerned by the effect that the closure of Blackpool's SEVs would have on the workers, whilst the way in which the council handled the proposal suggests that proper process has not been followed.

Combined, the four clubs employ hundreds of workers: dancers, bar staff, security staff and management. Closing them down would negatively impact businesses that supply and maintain the local night-time economy, which has already suffered greatly due to Covid-19.

Furthermore, shutting down SEVs will not stop women from continuing to practice their **legal** profession. Many of the dancers, especially those that had to turn to s*x work out of necessity, will keep on working. This is due to numerous reasons, including; staying out of poverty, working around childcare commitments and the support of disabled family members, or as a career that provides time for educational advancement, and an outlet for expression within the creative and performing arts. Banning these clubs will only result in depriving them from a safe, regulated, and licensed environment to perform in. Meanwhile, bars and clubs will still be able to host ad-hoc str*pping events under TENs licenses all over the city, whilst dancers will potentially have to work at private parties (either in hotel rooms or at the customers' own properties), work in underground clubs or might have to get into more dangerous forms of s*x work.

A nil-policy will not lead to harm reduction - in fact it minimises access to safeguards such as worker access to security or CCTV, resulting in extremely unsafe positions. Taking away the very basic right to be safe at work from a worker practicing a legal profession simply because it does not align with your own personal moral values is a very dangerous path to take.

On 1st May 2021, we reached out to Blackpool's council as no business owner or dancer seemed to have been invited to take part in the licensing committee hearing that took place on 19th January 2021. Furthermore, no document seemed to have been submitted to support a change in policy. The current SEV policy in the UK states clearly that moral judgements and objections have no place when making decisions on the licensing of those establishments. Only evidence-based reports can initiate a change in policy, such as a Cumulative Impact Assessment from the local police that would demonstrate that the venues are a nuisance or dangerous for the public. No such document was submitted, and no member of the licensing committee made any comment that was not based on their own personal views of the industry.

One of the officers from the council that we contacted, said that the club owners were informed about the meeting prior to it taking place. We reached out to the owners concerned and one of them said they were only made aware of what was going on thanks to the information available in the press.

Moreover, the nature of the communication between the council and the media is troubling. According to the officer we have been in touch with, the local press reported that the public consultation had started its 8-week long period the day after the meeting in January. At the beginning of April, four articles in the national press reported that the consultation had only just started when in fact it had closed. This, in addition to the council's website not being updated appropriately, the information not being easily accessible and the clubs being closed due to the pandemic, made it very difficult for the public, affected workers and customers to oppose the proposed policy and have their say, particularly when they might not live in the immediate area.

It looks like the whole process was purposefully and quietly rushed through to ensure its success.

We have consulted with the former co-chair of a licensing committee in a different city and they have informed us that it is very poor practice to run a public consultation alongside local elections. They also highlighted the fact that the Blackpool committee wants to enforce a blanket ban across the city when SEV caps should correspond to wards restricted in coverage to no more than roughly 10,000 people. The area covered by Blackpool Council, although only 35km², consists of 21 wards and a population of approximately 139,000.

Closing down SEVs under the argument that it will make the city more "family friendly" is very questionable, as the venues do not have any outside advertisement and are only open at night, when children are most likely at home, sleeping. Will the regular bars and clubs have to close down too? This is the logical conclusion of this line of argument.

In addition, we are concerned by the language used and comments made by some of the councillors. "It's not the sort of thing ladies should be doing" said Councillor Hutton [in the Metro, May 2021](#).

Women should be free to do what they please with their bodies and should not be judged or publicly degraded for their choices.

It has been said in the press that the council wants to close the venues down to "cleanse" the city. This word is not only negative but dangerous. It also implies that dancers are "dirty", perpetuates a very harmful stereotype about our industry and adds to the stigma. Besides, does it demonstrate that the council is pursuing a class-based agenda and is trying to gentrify the city?

Local government has a duty to consult and consider as broad a spectrum of members of the local community as is possible. SEV owners and workers are members of the local community too. We respectfully remind Blackpool's licensing committee of their duty.

We hereby call for you to reconsider your decision and open communication with local SEV owners and workers to reach an agreement that all sides find acceptable.

Kind regards,

The Members of the National SEV Coalition

www.nationalsevcoalition.org.uk

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Consultation contribution from the NSWC
Collated by Toni Mansell - Chairperson

Prior to Covid, I was a stripper within Sexual Entertainment Venues for over a decade, a job I am proud to say I worked, and a role that gave me the skills, confidence and experience to become a successful business owner. I worked in this role in cities all around the UK, including Blackpool, which is why I have an invested interest both as a representative of Sex Workers in the North of England, and as a worker potentially impacted by the proposed zero cap. Although Covid has forced many of us into semi-retirement, the nature of stripping as a self employed form of income means that many dancers work the role for its flexibility; to take employment breaks around education, other employment, and life circumstances such as child rearing. Many dancers potentially take breaks of several years before returning to the job. This is especially true for cities such as Blackpool, which boast a seasonal economy (as is commonly associated with seaside resorts such as Skegness and Brighton) where dancers are often not local residents within the Council Authority, rather they travel to these areas to work during the peak tourist seasons.

It is a great shame as a travelling dancer, with a comprehensive list of safe, well regulated, enjoyable clubs that I felt comfortable and protected working in, to find that list becoming smaller and smaller each year, not due to the clubs closing of their own volition, but due to the decision of councils to zero cap the areas in question under the weight of pressure from extremist anti-sex work organisations, and gentrification regimes that place blame on our industry for problems relating to social disorder, and target our clubs as a 'quick fix' solution to assuage public fear relating to the nighttime economy, and demonstrate that the relevant authorities are 'doing something' about the country wide cultural problem of anti social behaviour and alcohol related violence, particularly violence against women.

Within this contribution I will be using statistical evidence to prove that this action is poorly informed, ineffective, and in fact, that zero cap cities have shown INCREASED rates of violence and anti-social behaviour since introducing these policies. I will also be using contributions from our collective community to demonstrate to the licencing committee the dangers posed by removing licenced premises, and forcing dancers into the underground scene, which inevitably will flourish in the face of prohibition. This directly opposes the stated aims of the council to show commitment to 'violence against women'.

I have been following with great interest the claims being purported regarding the bid to place a nil cap of Blackpool and remove the licences of your 4 existing strip clubs – namely the claims that this strategy is predicted to reduce the numbers of violent and sexual crimes against women in the area, and also improve anti-social behaviour as part of Blackpool's 'family friendly' strategy to improve it's image.

I have worked in a club that lost it's licence under such an agenda, Platinum Lounge in Chester City centre. Platinum Lounge was an incredibly well run club, with dancer

safety at the forefront and a culture of respect for the dancers, where we were treated fairly and well cared for and protected.

The club and its workers were subject to many of the same claims I have been reading in relation to Blackpool's zero cap campaign - that Strip Clubs were inherently damaging and degrading to women, that their existence contributed towards violence against women, and that a moral cleansing needed to happen to rid the city of the club; a war against objectification and the sexualising of women.

Over 80 staff became unemployed and dancers were displaced, being forced to travel further and lose regular customers and income, as well as putting them at increased risk of violence in less regulated venues such as 'pop up' clubs that are not held to the same standards as those under SEV Licensing (displacing sex workers from their places of work is proven to increase the risk factors associated with the role)

<https://www.lshrm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2018/criminalisation-and-repressive-policing-sex-work-linked-increased-risk>.

There is a wealth of academic research available, which challenges the claims being made in favour of a nil cap in Blackpool. The Sex Work Research Hub hosts an array of brilliant academics, some ex sex workers themselves, who have produced articles and statistics to question the inherent link between Sexual Entertainment Services and normalised violence against women.

Of particular note, Jane Scoular is currently the Principal Investigator on an ESRC-funded project '**Sex work and Sexual Violence (2021-23)**' which explores how socio-legal contexts shape the experiences of sexual violence among people engaging in sex work. Important context forgotten in the absolutist arguments of "Not Buying It" and similar organisations, that have been vocal on the topic of Bristol's nil cap deliberation. Additionally, co-chair Professor Teela Sanders produced work on this very issue I am writing to you regarding today, '**Regulating Strip-Based Entertainment: Sexual Entertainment Venue Policy and the Ex/Inclusion of Dancers' Perspectives and Needs**' stating "*how community and campaign group voices were heard over that of the dancers themselves*".

This is certainly poignant, as the livelihoods of Blackpool's dancers are being threatened with erasure due to the elevated voices of 'women's rights groups' and Council members rather than the perspectives of the dancers themselves being held as of the highest importance. Additionally, as dancers have been prevented from participating meaningfully in the public consultation due to the barriers to accessibility created by Covid 19 and the associated lockdowns, and the failure of the Council to ensure transparent reporting of a public consultation taking place.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/blackpool-axe-lap-dancing-clubs-23843174>
(2nd April 2021)

<https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/uk-stag-capital-blackpool-ban-23844221>
(2nd April 2021)

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/14533288/blackpool-bans-lap-dancing-clubs-family-friendly-resort/>

(2nd April 2021)

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/blackpool-lap-dancing-clubs-ban-b-1826320.html>

(3rd April)

I have included links to 4 press stories, all using the exact same quotes and information verbatim (which suggests this is a standard press release as written by Blackpool Council, published by varying media outlets) which clearly all state there will now be an 8 week public consultation process. However, the consultation in fact closed for contributions on 31st March.

Due to the nature of Sex Work, especially Stripping, many dancers do not work in their home towns for the sake of safety and anonymity. Dancers will also work particular areas for summer months when the economy thrives, and elsewhere when the season ends, as the number of dancers required decreases. Many customers who enjoy Blackpool's strip clubs will also be seasonal tourists (in fact, it is exactly these 'outsiders' that patronise the clubs that the council have stated they want to discourage). Many dancers and customers alike who will be impacted by the Zero Cap are likely to not live in the Blackpool area, and as such their ability to contribute has been severely impacted by this incorrect reporting, and by the lockdown that was in place for the whole consultation period.

The NSWC is grateful that a legal representative via contact we made with the democratic officer allowed us to contribute until 4th June. But it is concerning when considering the grave impact this policy decision could have on so many lives and livelihoods, to see these kinds of careless mistakes being made. Additionally, there are questions we would like answered, such as why was the process so rushed?

The council's announcement that it was putting this proposal forward was made several days before they met on January 19th to discuss the decision. The public consultation was seemingly launched the next day. This was during a national lockdown, when clubs had been closed for a period of almost 12 months. This placed the clubs at a disadvantage as it created barriers to accessing key stakeholders to inform them of the process for contributing. It also meant that a lot of the usual ways of advertising a public consultation, such as in local libraries and town halls, were not in use, as well as the venues themselves. It is also according to our contact who previously sat on a licencing committee, considered poor practise to run a public consultation alongside local elections, and the wards of Highfield and Norbreck ran by elections for local councillors on Thursday 6 May 2021, meaning this campaigning was ongoing during the consultation process.

Additionally, it appears no stakeholders have been invited to speak to the licencing committee at any point in this process.

In 'Flexible Workers: Labour, regulation and the political economy of the stripping

industry' Sanders and Hardy conclude "*Dancers occupy a privileged position for understanding and critiquing their own conditions of existence... Dancers can speak, if only we will listen*". It is shameful that this informed perspective has been ignored.

There are more complicated questions relating to Blackpool that it would be really beneficial to receive answers to, for example, how can Blackpool justify a zero cap on their entire Council authority, when considering the fact that, in general, SEV caps are varied by wards, which are restricted to areas of roughly 10,000 people, but the area covered by Blackpool Council, although only 35km², consists of 21 wards and a population of approximately 139,000. The Council's website states that "Blackpool Council's policy is to limit the numbers of sexual entertainment venues to 4. Such venues are only permitted in the Bloomfield, Claremont and Talbot wards." Why is it necessary to completely eradicate the entire industry under the guise of being 'family friendly'? Do all nightclubs have to close too, because they're not 'family friendly'? What is the purpose of this sweeping ban, and why are the council not willing to enter discussion to find a compromise between the adult industry and their vision for the sea front?

Unfortunately, beyond the interaction with the democratic officer which I have already detailed, the council have failed to respond to any efforts to open conversation made by worker-led organisations and representatives, including failing to respond to an official complaint I made on the 9th May.

It is also gravely concerning to read the outdated and discriminatory comments being made by those trying to push through these policy changes, such as "it's not the sort of thing ladies should be doing" (Councillor Hutton, as quoted in the Metro, May 2021). The legislation that underpins SEV licencing means that our employment should not be threatened by moral opinions, feelings, nor image based reasons, as have all been stated by Peter Hunter and Mr Hutton. It does not matter if any councilman does not agree with our autonomy to dance, his position as a licencing committee seat is not to comment on his personal opinions about Stripping.

There were mentions in these press releases of 'complaints from members of the public', but the main quotes from the council to justify this proposal related to the clubs being 'seedy', and in relation to gentrification, to 'clean up' Blackpool's image. The language used was emotive of associating Strip Clubs with being dirty and causing social disorder in the 'sort of' people they attract. This rhetoric being published in national and local media with no dissenting opinion, no voice of the stakeholders, and no voices speaking for the worker experience until we got involved means that our livelihoods have been up for public debate and discussion without us invited to have a seat at that table - figuratively and literally, with no worker representation invited to the meetings. This creates an unbalanced power dynamic, where we are spoken for, and of, on decisions that affect our lives, without our expert contribution.

Since I am interested in facts and research, and the aforementioned councillors quoted in published press have made claims that strip clubs are responsible for violent

behaviour, I thought it pertinent to question if there was any statistical evidence to demonstrate the reduction in rates of violent crime in the instance of an English city with a pre-existing zero cap. In my previous incarnation, I was a Probation Services Officer, undertaking a PQUIP with the National Offender Management Service. I am trained in the areas of working with men who have committed violent crimes, and sexual offenses against women, so I have both personal and professional interest and experience in this kind of data.

Research

Using Platinum Lounge as a case study, I began to research government statistics to see if, in fact, there was any evidence that its closure and nil cap within the city had indeed reduced rates of violence, in order to add the weight of evidence to Bristol's decision making rationale.

Platinum Lounge in Chester was closed in July 2015, so I have elected to look at the crime statistics for Chester to see if closing the city's only strip club contributed to reducing the rates of violent crimes reported in Chester City Centre.

As a sampling unit, I looked at the month of December, starting in December 2013, which includes 2 years of statistics prior to Platinum Lounge's closure, up to and including December 2019, before Covid closed the majority of nightlife venue, as this wouldn't be an accurate comparison to include figures from the lockdown period.

In Dec 2013 there were 46 recorded violent crimes in Chester City centre.

In Dec 2014 there were 58 recorded violent crimes in Chester city centre.

In December 2015 there were 63, 2016, there were 70, 2017 there were 127, 2018 101, and in 2019 5 years after Chester's purge of its Strip Club, there were 99 recorded violent crimes in Chester city centre.

These statistics can be fact checked from the source

<https://www.ukcrimestats.com/Neighbourhood/9887>

Now, to ensure this data was not an outlier for the month of December, I decided to repeat a study of comparison of rates of violence for another month, namely June, which means we can include June 2015 in the pre-closure bracket for comparison, as Platinum Lounge did not close until July 2015.

June 2013 – 44

June 2014 – 34

June 2015 – 40

June 2016 - 58

June 2017 - 49

June 2018 - 70

June 2019 - 72

Again, in this sample, the numbers of Violent crimes in Chester City centre have

increased year upon year AFTER Platinum Lounge's closure. This is even more interesting as the numbers had actually dropped for 2014 and 2015 - It is in the years following the Strip Club closure that violence rose, pointing at the opposite narrative that the Strip Club's presence kept the rates of violence in Chester City centre down?

<https://www.police.uk/your-area/cheshire-constabulary/chester-city/?tab=Statistics> further confirmed that in the last 3 years, Violence and Sexual Offences in Chester City Centre had increased by 22.2% (percentages true as of 23/03/2021).

These statistics include Violent crime as one encompassing bracket of violence and sexual assault, these are offenses grouped into 2 broader categories, violence with injury, and violence without injury (not including robberies). So although I could not access sexual assault statistics for the city centre individually for these dates periods, I further researched the overall annual crime statistics for Chester and Cheshire West from Cheshire West and Chester Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2015 to see if the trends followed the same pattern. This is a larger geographical scope of the partnership area, but gives a good indication if we can consider the figures above to accurately reflect the trends of sexual violence.

The number of sexual offences recorded in Cheshire West and Chester increased by 21% from 317 in 2014 to 383 in 2015. This is a continued increase from 218 in 2012 and 279 in 2013.

In 2016, the total number of recorded sexual offenses in Chester and Cheshire West was 461. For the year 2019, this number had risen to 800 recorded cases. (source - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedatabycommunitysafetypartnershiparea>)

While this look at data and figures was only a brief investigation, it strongly implies that closing the city's only strip club did not impact the numbers of violent crimes in any way, in fact they have risen year upon year. Even taking into account influencing factors such as the change in the way certain crimes were recorded which contributed to a rise in statistics for crimes such as Anti Social Behaviour in 2016, there is zero evidence to prove that removing strip clubs reduced violence, and particularly violence against women, in Chester.

We ask the committee to consider this evidence in their decision making process, can they stand behind the claim that strip clubs increase violence when we have documented statistics that prove otherwise?

It is intellectually and academically dishonest to put weight behind a bid to close Strip Clubs under the guise that their removal will reduce the numbers of violent crimes within Blackpool, when statistics from a case study of a city with a nil cap shows no impact on the rates of violence.

By closing down strip clubs and removing the autonomy of those women to work, councils will be acceding to the puritanical moral panic created by sex work

exclusionary groups who seek to persecute sex workers and the industry, and putting a band aid on the issue for a 'quick fix'. Rather than undertaking the difficult work to introduce long term rehabilitative methods to reduce offending in those men with proclivity to commit violence against women, such as investing in re-education of social and cultural norms that embolden men to harrass women through archaic, patriarchal rhetoric. Through my own experience working for the Ministry of Justice, we are taught to challenge the misogynistic attitudes of offenders who commit crimes against women, in order to reduce the rates of recidivism in those crimes. Perhaps our Councils, and indeed government, need to look away from an avenue of action with no evidence to support it's success, and focus on strategies to reduce violence against women with proven success.

Thank you for your time and I hope you consider these statistics, and research claims being propagated, before making your decision to disempower working women, and increase the risk of harm to them. If clubs are closed, the stripping scene WILL be pushed underground. We have collated a short report on the dangers of this eventuality as part of our contribution, along with testimonials from a cross section of the Blackpool sex work and strip club community.

Contributions from our members and allies who are residents of Blackpool, work in Blackpool's Strip Clubs, or Patronise them.

We have not altered any of the writing of the contributions sent in by our members and allies, and have only included what identifying information each individual was happy to have shared. We hope that these testimonials will give a humanising voice to the community of the Strip Clubs, and help the council to become better informed of our lived experiences outside of the archaic, outdated stereotypes perpetuated in the press by Peter Hunter and Adrian Hutton. These councillors have spoken for us and about us in ways that we do not resonate with as the real people of the industry being demonised. We are not seedy. We are not exploited. We do not need to be held to outdated traditionalist ideas of what a 'lady' should be doing. Not all strip club patrons are men. Not all sex workers are cis het women.

Amber's Contribution

Amber has asked us to share her story as part of our consultation contribution as a Transgender woman who lives in Blackpool. Amber is a Sex Worker within our collective, who believes her story about her journey deciding she wanted to be a stripper should be heard, so committee members can understand what happens when women cannot access clubs to work in, and to shed misconceptions about the regulated industry.

"I wrote to clubs in the U.K., they were totally against me doing it. Some didn't write back, some offered me contracts that they knew I wouldn't be able to accept. Some didn't know what to say because they all knew writing back saying no your a TS girl we don't accept you is against equality employment legislation.

In the meantime I'm thinking how can I do this just by me using my own resources, I tried strippergrams who put me on the books and didn't give me anything as they didn't advertise me, I though I could do private parties or private individual dances. I soon found out that they weren't interested in me dancing except for an intro they were interested in the extras I could provide after it. With that security worried me. A room with one guy or a number of guys and just me?? I decided against it, although I did do a stag night for a female friends friends which was fine... as I knew them. I also danced at a gay club doing just pole on a stage once a month and loved it, but I was safe and the management and security were excellent.

So I still wanted to break the mould with a normal strip club, still nothing... it's obvious that there are plenty of guys out there that wanted to see girls like me dance.

So by total chance I was out one Saturday and stopped at a shop for cigarettes. Normal shop normal place... this guy came over and said I'd like you to work for my company, my girlfriend is the boss please give her a call and he shouted a number at me... I was so shocked I didn't remember anything except the name... an escort agency. It played

on my mind for a few days and I had a remote interest in wondering what the job entailed but wasn't intending to do such a thing. But I thought maybe I could use it if a way of getting this sexy side out there where others wouldn't let me. So I found out who it was and did the job part time for around 3-4 years until family found out and I had to leave. All my time working for 3 different NE agencies I was treated well, earned good money and had security at hand if I needed it, I didn't need it and 99.9% of people who came to see me were nice, only once did I have to ask someone to leave and he did. Surprisingly I did actually enjoy this job and have no regrets. In some ways it's a job I loved doing, someone wants you, someone admires you, you can dress as you please, you find a pride in dressing up for your clients, you can have pleasant times, I was appreciated by my bosses at this job, party's, Christmas presents, dinners out and even security meetings and seminars officially arranged with our local Police and NHS Good money too. So there was actually more care and better pay there than at normal jobs. No doing it I miss that adoration factor, it's always nice someone fancies you! And to our legislators I would also add... you were quite happy to take my taxes and earn from it because ALL my earnings were declared.

During that time I had a breakthrough... a club in Germany wanted me to dance, I booked holiday to do it, left within a month to finally dance where I wanted to! I was well treated, the club had security, the female manager was very strict but fair, we always got paid exactly right and on time, the club was spotless. I still swap messages with them to this day and yes they would have me back. I also made friends for life with the Czech girls I danced with, they looked after me like Sisters and I stay with them still and have a totally free holiday if I go and the best guided tour of Prague.

Upon coming back to the U.K. I was determined to dance here. In the end I found a club in Redcar 'Angels' who finally let me dance! I can go there anytime and dance I just have to call them.

The pandemic, ... social media, I've had so many requests for private dances and more. Messages asking when am I going back to my club or do you have a private page or can you send me a video etc. To which I've done none. So that pressures still there when everything is closed.

The conclusion of my story is that if your not allowed to do what you'd like to do you will find the nearest avenue, especially if you need the money to live. Social media now will supply the means, but accepting it would be dangerous. I didn't it was a challenge for me. That avenue may not be safe, it may not be exactly what your looking to do, but if your circumstances force you you may end up in an unsafe place, you may end up really doing something you'd rather not be doing. (or maybe you want to do it). Safe choices are the key.

This country has such a opportunity here to create safe spaces and businesses for Sex Workers, to protect them, to earn tax from them, to completely put things above board. SW is as old as time, it will always be here above ground or below, the choice is theirs. This is 2021 why then the Puritan hang ups. If they were straight about it it would be just

a normal part of society take it or leave it. By doing what their doing because they don't understand it and puritanically don't want to their making things worse in all respects for all sex workers. If their thinking also by doing this it's helping society their not... loss of jobs, pushing workers below ground, making their lives unsafe, and in some cases they will be creating frustrated dangerous individuals who will find other ways to please their desires.”

Matt's contribution. Although from Southend, Matt has been a patron of Blackpool's Strip Clubs regularly over the years, as he enjoys visiting the town to enjoy the sights and nightlife.

“Strip clubs are a staple of seaside towns. People come from all over to visit them boosting trade in the area. Not only that, locals enjoy going there, either for companionship or escapism from their everyday lives.

You get a lot more trouble in pubs and clubs without strippers. Striptease venues are different from normal places - a lot of the problems you would normally get aren't as prevalent.

If the strip clubs in Blackpool were closed, it wouldn't feel good, as those are jobs that people are going to miss out on.”

Jo's Contribution. Jo is a Stripper within our collective. Prior to Covid she worked seasonally in Blackpool, and regularly in Manchester/Preston/Bolton.

“I've danced for 13 years. I literally can't comprehend them shutting the clubs, I feel FAR safer at work than in any random bar and it will just push women into unsafe situations because it's not going to remove the demand.”

Kara's contribution - Kara Bulpitt, Wigan resident, is a customer who patronises Blackpool's strip Clubs. (It is rare that representation is given to the voices of women who enjoy strip clubs as clients, and we feel it is important to platform their experience.)

“So here's a input from a straight happily married women who worked for the NHS for 24 years and now local authority.

I have never been a stripper.

Many years ago a friend was and as she was entering retirement we would visit strip clubs across the north west England.

I've always had the outlook of don't judge and do what makes you feel you and happy. Going into a strip club empowered me.

The atmosphere, the movement of the women the strength. I was in complete awe. I would also pay for a dance from the women out of respect. I would never go in and just sit at the bar. I would brace the beauty of what these women were doing.

Most did it to earn extra cash as where at uni etc but a lot choice this as there profession their career. It suited their families and they were very good at their job.

I always felt safe as a client. I would be treated with kindness and support. Other staff members respected each other. Especially in Blackpool. Yes I would go with my children and enjoy Blackpool this way but I'd also enjoy time in the club's other nights.

Women choose to work their and choose their careers. I chose to go their and choose to spend money and time with everyone there.

ITS OUR CHOICE

I've been to strip clubs and seen ONE person thrown out in 8 years for being inappropriate. But I've seen far too many in more bars and clubs

Strip clubs are a choice and extremely fun and safe to be in. Please keep them open. You're removing someone's choice of career for nothing."

Katy's contribution. Katy is a Blackpool resident who worked one of the non-sex work roles within Blackpool's Strip Clubs. These are jobs that will also be eradicated if a zero cap is imposed, which seem to have been absent from the public discussions.

"My first job as an adult was bar maid and later bar manager of heaven. I was close to leaving education because I couldn't earn enough income around my studies then I found that job. The bar brought a lot of revenue to the town with stag parties etc who would come to us and then go out in town afterwards. It was extremely rare we had aggressive customers and when we did there was ample security that sorted it quickly. I made friends with a lot of dancers, every one was of them was self employed and a dancer by choice.

Spending my teens and early twentys in Blackpool I worked in most nightlife venues at some point, I had significantly less problems with being groped, threatened or aggression from customers in heaven that at any non strip bar, pub or nightclub I worked at in Blackpool."

Toni's Contribution.

“This is my personal contribution. Not as the Chair of the NSWC, but as a researcher and activist... and most importantly, as a dancer with years of experience working in Blackpool.



In fact, I was actually the face that advertised the short-lived Rouge Gentlemen's Club on Clifton Street. (I've even included a picture - that is indeed me!) When the promotional staff would walk through the town centre with advertising to try to tempt party goers into the club, it was my picture that was displayed.

Interestingly, I not only worked in Rouge as a stripper, but as a model for aspiring photographers, and as a dancer for a music video. The venue and performers were hired out for such opportunities, as the management saw us as the artists we are, and took pride in the establishment and performers. They supported us in acquiring work in other avenues of performance arts, should we be interested in them.

The idea that strippers are exploited, or underqualified for any other roles, or that the industry is a sleazy den of gaudy neon and salivating men is a clichéd misconception. As is the idea that we cater exclusively to lairy stag dos and lager louts, and that dissuading those clients will cause the clubs to go out of business. Less discussed or understood in wider society is the intimate, holistic role dancers play in the lives of many clients. Danielle Egan wrote a fascinating book regarding dancers and the dynamic of the relationships they have with their regular customers, taking an intricate look at this therapeutic role of comfortable companionship with clear boundaries. These customers are also often our highest paying clients, as well as the most respectful, and I can assure you from my own experiences working in Blackpool that as a town with a large number of the population aged over 60, with disposable income, many of your most lucrative strip club patrons are from this demographic. Many men are lonely, do not wish to be unfaithful to their partner or hurt any feelings, but enjoy the companionship and intimacy of a bond of trust they build with a club dancer. They pay to talk, be listened to,

to hear stories of a life far outside their own scope of existence, and do so while sitting in the presence of a charming woman, without any complications or mixed messages.

Also one of the biggest misconceptions of the Strip Clubs is that they are violent, or contribute to violence due to 'objectification'. When in fact, the statement we hear most commonly repeated by dancers (and it has also been repeated by women bar staff and patrons too in these contributions) is "I feel safer in Strip Clubs than in any other nightlife establishment" and "I have experienced more violence and sexual assault in 'normal' nightlife venues than I ever have in an SEV."

This is my experience too. I was punched in the face by a 'local' while enjoying a recreational weekend in Blackpool, in fact I was visiting to enjoy an event with Amber (quoted above) and several other friends from across the UK. The reason? I was 'in her way' on the stairs in a nightclub. I went home with a black eye. This is the only experience I have with being assaulted in a Blackpool club. The fact the councillors have blamed 'outsiders' and strip clubs for unwelcome behaviour in a 'family friendly' resort, and yet my only experience of such behaviour has been in a non SEV at the hands of a local, speaks volumes for how misguided and poorly informed the decision to pin blame on our industry truly is.

It is simply a practise of turning us, as a marginalised faction of people, into the current 'folk devil' for Blackpool to blame for socio-economic problems and public disorder, encouraging the community to 'other' us, and then imposing policy to restore public confidence in the council's ability to 'get things done.' As a previous employee of the British Criminal Justice system, having studied Policy for a Community Justice BA and a Social Psychology BSc, I have not only seen many examples of the same practise being applied to other factions throughout history, but also have studied the outcomes of effectiveness of these policies. Invariably, they have failed to achieve their proposed outcomes, and have increased the rates of discrimination, risk of harm and exclusion for the people to which they are applied.

As Amber disclosed, I too have been offered both private and underground work during the pandemic, while clubs are closed. There is no way to avoid the reality that if regulated SEV licenced strip clubs are closed entirely in Blackpool, you WILL have an underground scene flourish, creating the exact problems the council are considering policy changes to counter."

The NSWC Vice-Chairperson has spoken to our collective to collate worker's voices and real life experiences of the underground scene to better educate the committee regarding the reality of the thriving underground strip club industry, that prohibition is shown to directly contribute towards increased demand for. As Blackpool promotes itself as being committed to reducing violence against women, in solidarity with the White Ribbon campaign, we feel it is imperative that the committee understands the increased risk of harm, exploitation, and violence against women that removing regulated establishments contributes to.

The Consequences of Closing Strip Clubs

By Gemma Gilson

Let's assess the impact of closing strip clubs in the UK and, specifically, the effects this would inevitably have on the Blackpool area. Due to the pandemic, we have a rare opportunity to see the consequences of strip clubs being closed in action. I have spoken with a number of strippers who have had to find other means during the pandemic, with strip club spaces being shut. Here are their experiences in their own words¹.

Stripper 1: *"I'm in Scotland and I know for sure some of my dancer friends did private parties. They did it independently rather than through an agency. They were finding their own clients through instagram etc., so they didn't have security. This is absolutely more dangerous working conditions than a club. It worries me the number of dancers that have had to turn to performing at private parties to make up for lost income while clubs have been shut.*

If there's a nil cap on strip clubs, more people will get strippers to perform at private parties where they might be at remote locations without their own transport and security, without cameras and outnumbered by men. Many dancers will have no choice but to work in these unsafe spaces if you take strip clubs away. Sex work will always be a thing whether you like it or not, so you should continue to facilitate a safe space for these practises to happen in, in order to protect the workers that choose to be involved.

Stripper 2: *"Due to clubs being shut, I had to conduct underground work in order to survive. I met a few loyal customers in hotel rooms. I was only offering the same services as what they would get at the club: lap dances, nudity, flirtation, conversation. No sexual activities. I found it way more challenging to keep those boundaries clear in that environment compared to the club. And of course, without security, there's always a risk something bad could happen. I feel safe in the strip club environment because I know there is security to have my back and customers must abide by house rules, so I know my boundaries won't get violated. I feel in danger and exposed working the way I have had to. I don't know what I'd do if my strip club was taken away from me when we are able to go back to work."*

Stripper 3: *"I've been working a few underground parties up north while clubs have been shut when I have been really needing the money. One job was a private party at a stag do. It was me, another dancer and fifteen guys. We were hired by them for hostessing and private dances. We both felt really nervous about the job, because we*

¹ All statements are anonymous to protect the identity of these people for the following reasons: all sources agreed to give statements providing they remain anonymous; not all sex workers are 'out' and wish to keep it this way due to the social stigma around sex work (being 'out' could affect personal relationships, safety and other job or job prospects); some experiences detail traumatic experiences; all underground activities evidently break covid rules.

didn't know any of the guys and it was just going to be us, in the middle of nowhere, in a huge house. We turned up at the venue and because it was in the middle of the countryside, we had no phone signal- we were at least hoping even without security that we would have our phones if we had an emergency. But then again, we could only call people we knew, we couldn't call police because we were breaking pandemic rules. So we were very much going in blind and without protection. I always knew at the club I would be safe with the bouncers right on hand to help out and I knew I would be protected, so this experience was the complete opposite and I felt at risk. I was lucky to have the other dancer there that night as we could try to look after each other. The guys were okay...but they were breaking our boundaries a lot. It's really easy to assert your boundaries in the club because you have to stick to the no touching rules and if a customer gets whiny about it, you have the power to say no and even kick them out if they dare even try breaking club rules. But in this situation, the only reason for you to say no is because you as a dancer doesn't want to. When you're selling a fantasy, this doesn't bode very well and it can easily either put clients off or they may like that they've put you in a vulnerable position and exploit that. There's only so much 'politely saying no' you can do in these situations. Both me and the other dancer were groped all night against our wishes. All the men were incredibly drunk and out of control. We also had some serious advances from the man that had booked us and tried to force us to sleep with him. We managed to quickly pack up and get out of there before the situation escalated. I've had some underground parties go better, some worse. But ultimately, I do not feel safe working in these spaces and these experiences make me cherish having safe and regulated strip clubs."

Stripper 4: *"I worked at one underground 'pop up strip club' a month ago, my experience was so bad I wouldn't ever try a place like that again. We were assured there would be security on the night, but they were caught up in the whole party and weren't looking after the dancers. Everything was totally wild and unregulated, it was very much a free for all. There was drink and drugs everywhere, it was so messy and scary to work that night. We had a dingy room in the back to conduct private dances. There were no cameras or security waiting outside unlike the club, so I had to be on my guard more than usual. It was really difficult as well as I was working alongside some full service sex workers, so many clients assumed these were the levels I was working to as well. I feel very triggered by that night. I've been very privileged to be supported enough during the pandemic that I haven't had to work more underground events. But things will go back to normal soon enough and I will rely on my local club massively."*

Stripper 5: *"I am a university student and currently a carer for my disabled mum. This year has been incredibly hard on us financially, so I've continued working as a stripper. I have been travelling to an underground club in London. It's a totally unregulated place in someone's basement. No cameras, no security. Customers know they can exploit us because there's no-one to protect us and we can't object. Some dancers offer higher levels than I do as well and this leaves customers confused and sometimes angry when I say I don't offer that. I'm one of the dancers that may be directly affected by a nil cap being introduced. This will turn my world upside down. I won't be able to support myself or my mum and I won't be able to do a job that I enjoy. Or at least it's a choice between*

that and continually putting my safety at risk. I've seen some other dancers in these places get more hurt, harassed and abused than me. I don't want that to happen, but I may not have the choice. Give us the choice."

All testimonials from these strippers clearly show us that, whatever the situation, strip work and sex work will persist and exist. There will always be a demand and there will always be workers to satisfy this demand. Despite being in a global pandemic, this work has continued and thrived, albeit illegal. Closing strip clubs when the world 'reopens' will not stop this activity. We have a glimpse into the consequences of shutting these spaces and impact on workers. In eradicating Blackpool's strip clubs, you will only force this nature of work underground in dangerous environments. The singular result will be an increase in illegal and unregulated activity. Crime rates will go up, your citizens will be in danger. In strip clubs, workers are able to carry out their jobs in a legal and safe way. These spaces offer security and regulations to the highest degree. Taking these away will only put workers in harm's way. Those that have chosen to do this work should not have this option taken away from them, especially when this is a question of morality. Strippers wholly value SEVs and need these spaces. Do not punish those that have had to survive through such a difficult year. Please keep these spaces open to allow strippers to conduct their legal services in a controlled, regulated and safe space.

Final Words from the NSWC

The Northern Sex Work Collective implores the committee to vote against the ill advised zero cap, and instead sit down with us as experts in the industry, to work together to create a strategy for Blackpool that creates the best outcomes for EVERYONE. Especially those most vulnerable to being hurt by these policies. We have seen from the public facing meeting recording that the Licencing committee has not had one stakeholder present to guide their decision, and there has been zero representation of the voice of the worker, sex industry advocates and experts, nor those best qualified to comment of the accurate experiences of those engaged in the strip club industry. This has been painfully apparent in the misogynistic and poorly informed moralistic statements certain councillors have made to the press. Let us not forget that moral arguments, nor image based reasoning are NOT sufficient justifications, in line with SEV legislation, to impose a zero cap. There is no reason why a reasonable, proportionate compromise cannot be reached between the council and the clubs, focusing on a harm reduction strategy that creates the best outcomes for everyone.

Toni Mansell
Chairperson of the Northern Sex Workers Collective