

Briefing for Bristol City Council's Sex Establishment Policy Review 2016/2017, presented by Bristol Women's Voice

Introduction

Bristol Women's Voice (BWV) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the council's review of Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) and we are pleased to be able to share our specialist expertise. We call unequivocally for a nil-cap on SEVs in Bristol.

Bristol Women's Voice was established in 2011 to represent the women of Bristol, to promote women's equality and to work with Bristol City Council to support it in its mission for gender equality.

The inequality between women and men, boys and girls, in Bristol has many aspects that are all related to one another. As gender specialists in Bristol, it is our view that the women of this city stand no chance of gaining equality with men while the council continues to licence sexism via SEVs. We recognise this policy review also covers sex cinemas and sex shops, but due to time constraints we are restricting our response to SEVs (business which promote the financial and social inequality between women and men, and the assumption that women's bodies are objects which men can buy).

In the past 12 months, Bristol City Council has consulted us on numerous policies with regards to the impact of those policies on women. We now present our views on the impact for women as a consequence of SEVs existing in Bristol: a topic that is 100% about women.

BWV is pleased to read that Bristol City Council's website states that the council is committed to advancing gender equality in the city, specifically stating that: "We will improve the safety of women and men by measuring street sexual harassment and follow up action and we will increase the uptake of specialist sexual violence services."¹

We highlight the facts that Bristol:

1. was the first city to sign up to the European Convention against Trafficking,
2. was the first UK city to sign up to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life,
3. was the first city to create a mayoral Women's Commission,
4. was one of the first UK cities to have a violence against women strategy,
5. was awarded White Ribbon status, showing the city's commitment to eliminating violence against women and girls,

¹ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/people-communities/gender-equality>

6. has the 'This Is Not An Excuse' programme of public advertising across the city to challenge ideas of sexual entitlement,
7. has a programme of education available to all of Bristol's early years, primary and secondary schools via the Bristol Ideal,
8. offers workplace DV training sessions being developed by Public Health Bristol; and
9. Bristol is host to the widely acclaimed Zero Tolerance initiative, working towards a city that is free from gender-based violence, abuse, harassment and exploitation.

Given all of this, it is incomprehensible that Bristol City Council should still licence SEVs to operate in the city. Bristol more than any other city should be nil-cap and should be proud to be so.

However, the very existence of SEVs licensed by the Council poses a risk to the wider society in Bristol and has a detrimental impact on the vast majority of people in Bristol who choose not to work in or frequent these establishments. Indeed, the existence of SEVs is the polar opposite of a city that celebrates equality and offers a sanctuary for all who need it. This is why we strongly call for Bristol to have a nil-cap on all SEVs with no exceptions.

Since the austerity cuts that began in 2010, BWV has seen an unacceptable number of women lose their jobs from specialist services working to prevent men's violence against women. These job losses are a direct result of funding cuts and the impact of their work has been felt acutely as the city struggles with increasing levels of violence towards women and decreased capacity to respond to these women. These job losses significantly outweigh the number of women who are self-employed in SEVs and who may lose their temporary, un-contracted zero-hours work when you implement a nil-cap.

Questions for the Council

Can Bristol City Council definitively say with 100% certainty that no SEV workers in Bristol are trafficked, have complex needs or are controlled and pimped by men?

Can Bristol City Council ensure the safety of all women and girls in the vicinity of these establishments and in the wider city?

How can Bristol City Council square its support for the Bristol Ideal school programme while supporting the objectification of women for the purpose of male gratification in SEVs?

How can boys in the city grow up to respect women as their equals, and how can girls grow up to have equal aspirations? Clear evidence exists that this equality does not extend to the adult world given that outdated performances of outdated sex roles persist. Bristol City Council has the opportunity to change this right now.

Existing Examples of Successful Nil-Cap Cities

There is already evidence of a nil-cap being successful elsewhere in the UK and we call on Bristol City Council to join other cities and be clear about your commitment to gender equality. Nil caps exist in similar forward-thinking university cities such as Swansea, Exeter, Coventry, North Tyneside and Warwick. Bristol must be next.

We invite Bristol City Council to make the links between its numerous pledges to gender equality and its licensing of establishments that exploit women, and to implement a nil-cap on all SEVs.

Impact on Bristol

Bristol city centre is rapidly changing, and since the council's last SEV policy review there has been a dramatic rise in residential housing in the city centre, particularly around Old Market and the Hippodrome where two of the city's current SEVs operate. As such, it is even less appropriate now than it ever was for SEVs to remain in these residential areas.

With this in mind, we invite the council to consider how two former Bristol SEVs have seen their premises become much more inclusive businesses.

1. Pata Negra (formerly Lounge @ 33) is now a thriving and respected tapas restaurant in the city centre. With rave reviews from more than 210 happy customers on TripAdvisor, the restaurant is rated the 92nd best in the city (out of 1,219)².
2. The Platinum Club on Denmark Street was more recently the Kush nightclub, and is now planned to be a café opening in January 2017³.

Both of these examples show that there is no shortage of entrepreneurs in Bristol who would welcome these central sites that SEVs currently occupy in which to set up successful, gender inclusive and popular businesses, and which would offer employment to many.

Conclusions

We ask that Bristol City Council takes heed of the points raised in this response and instils a nil-cap in Bristol, ensuring that this city truly is a safe and welcoming space for all women and girls, and demonstrating that sexism and gender inequality will not be tolerated any longer in Bristol.

² https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Restaurant_Review-g186220-d7147357-Reviews-Pata_Negra-Bristol_England.html

³ <http://www.bristol247.com/channel/news-comment/daily/animals/bristol-cat-cafe-to-open-in-january>

Bristol City Council has been claiming for many years that it is a city striving for gender equality, we urge it to take action to ensure this becomes a reality.

A nil-cap is the only option.