



Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Response (January 2017)

Preliminary consultation on the Bristol City Council Sex Establishment Policy Review 2016/17

Submitted by email by Inspector Martin Rowlands on behalf of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Contact email: PCC@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Introduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Avon and Somerset, Sue Mountstevens supports a nil cap policy on Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) within the local authority of Bristol. This view is based on the PCC's commitment to *Protect the Most Vulnerable From Harm* as set out in the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Plan.¹ As PCC, Sue Mountstevens is determined to take up every opportunity to reduce and tackle crime in Avon and Somerset. In terms of protecting the most vulnerable from harm, this is relevant to SEVs when it comes to tackling in particular, violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Prevention

The Police and Crime Plan sets out the PCC's ambition to *Protect the Most Vulnerable From Harm* which covers a range of crime types including domestic and sexual abuse and exploitation. This priority includes the objective to 'take a preventative approach and raise awareness of these crimes to challenge perpetrators and give victims confidence to report'.² The Constabulary and other agencies are seeing significant increases in reporting both in Bristol and Avon and Somerset. While this is positive, showing increased confidence in statutory and support agencies, we must not be complacent in our ambition to prevent future harm.

This focus on prevention is in line with the Home Office 2016 VAWG Strategy which states:

¹ <http://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/Your-PCC/Police-Crime-Plan-2016.aspx> p.8

² *Ibid* p.10

Preventing violence and abuse from happening in the first place will make a significant difference to overall prevalence of these crimes. We will continue to challenge the **deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against and limit women and girls** across all communities. [emphasis added] ³

This is of significance when looking at SEV policy as it is the PCC's view that SEVs, by offering paid performances by women contribute to social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against women and girls by objectifying them and placing them as a commodity. Indeed, the Home Office states that violence against women and girls is 'both a cause and consequence of gender inequality' which is an important statement to consider when the Licensing Committee is reviewing its policy on SEVs. ⁴

Bristol's commitments

As a signatory to the **European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life**, Bristol City Council recognises that "*gender-based violence arises from the idea, on the part of the perpetrator, of the superiority of one sex over the other in... an unequal relationship of power*".⁵ SEVs can be seen to contribute to a popular culture whereby women's bodies are objectified. This culture perpetuates the notion of "*the superiority of one sex over the other*" as identified in the Charter.⁶ Similarly, the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty includes the need to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment of women and advance equality of opportunity for women, as well as foster good relations between men and women which arguably the presence of SEVs does not do. In fact, research demonstrates that the sexual objectification of women, which can be seen to be encouraged and practiced within SEVs, acts to reinforce gender inequality.⁷

The PCC is proud of the **Bristol Zero Tolerance** initiative and is a signatory.⁸ This is important in the context of SEVs given that research published in 2014 shows that sexual objectification has a key role in the link between men's alcohol use and perpetration of sexual violence.⁹ Therefore, the presence of SEVs in Bristol can be seen to impact on the safety of women and girls. The licensing of SEVs contributes to the normalisation of exploitation and gender-based violence which initiatives such as Bristol Zero Tolerance are trying to combat.

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF p.9

⁴ *ibid* p.16

⁵ Council of European Municipalities and Regions, The European Charter of Equality for Women and Men in Local Life http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf Article 22.2

⁶ Bristol Women's Commission, Sexual Entertainment Venue Policy Statement, Licensing Special Purposes Sub Committee, 6th November 2014

⁷ See for example Home Office Sexualisation Review 2010 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065544/http://homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people.html>

⁸ <http://www.bristolzerotolerance.com/our-partners-2/police-and-crime-commissioner/>

⁹ Gervais et al (2014) Understanding the Link Between Men's Alcohol Use and Sexual Violence Perpetration: The Mediating Role of Sexual Objectification. *Psychology of Violence*.

The PCC has also been pleased to work jointly with **Safer Bristol** and **Bristol Public Health** on campaigns, services and initiatives aimed at tackling domestic and sexual abuse during her time in office. As such, the PCC cannot support the continuation of a licensing position which contravenes these efforts.

Concluding Remarks

Both in terms of the safety of performers at the venues and more globally in terms of preventing violence against women and girls, it is clear that Bristol has an opportunity to support the ambitions in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan in considering its policy on SEVs.

If Bristol is to take its commitment to tackling these crimes and gender equality seriously, then it should take the bold step of setting a nil cap for SEVs in Bristol.