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## CAMPAIGN TO REFORM LAP DANCING CLUB LICENSING

A joint briefing by Object and the Fawcett Society, February 2009

### Summary:

The Fawcett Society and Object are calling on the Government to reform the way lap dancing clubs are licensed – and to ensure that such reforms are robust and comprehensive. Lap dancing clubs should be licensed as Sex Encounter Venues so local authorities can apply crucial regulations and local people can have a say in the licensing process.

### About lap dancing clubs

The term 'lap dancing club' refers to venues where live entertainment is provided for the purposes of sexual stimulation of the customers. This includes routines referred to as lap dancing, table dancing, pole dancing, erotic dancing, stripping, and striptease. The UK's first lap dancing club opened in 1995. There are now at least 300 lap dancing clubs operating in the UK. Since the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 lap dancing clubs have only required a Premises Licence – just like any ordinary café or pub.

### The urgent need for licensing reforms

Lap dancing clubs are part of the sex industry and promote the sexist view that it is acceptable to treat women as sex objects, not people. Areas around lap dancing clubs are known to become 'no-go' areas for women, and women working in the clubs can face extremely poor working conditions.

However, lap dancing clubs are currently licensed in the same way as any ordinary café or pub via a licensing regime which tips the balance in favour of licence applicants. As a result local councils are prevented from applying vital conditions and controls on lap dancing clubs and local people are denied a say in whether or not clubs can open in their area. Objections to licence applications can only be raised by a small section of the local community under four limited grounds, as set out in the Licensing Act 2003 (public disorder, public nuisance, crime and disorder, protection of children). Crucially, objections cannot be raised on the basis that lap dancing clubs are detrimental to gender equality neither by local people nor by local councils. This places local councils in direct breach of Gender Equality Duty 2007, which requires them to consider gender in all decision making.

### The Government's Proposals

Following Object and Fawcett's campaign the Government has proposed reforms to the way lap dancing clubs are licensed. The proposals, contained in the Policing and Crime Bill and

currently being debated by MPs, will licence lap dancing clubs as Sex Encounter Venues. The aim is to offer local authorities greater powers and local communities a greater say.

However, the Government's proposals are inadequate on two counts:

1. **The reforms are optional:** The proposed legislation is not mandatory, and so will not guarantee all local communities a greater say in the licensing of lap dancing clubs. This outcome will instead depend on whether their local authority decides to adopt the legislation. This will give rise to a 'postcode lottery' over whether local communities have a say in the licensing of lap dancing clubs. An uneven licensing landscape is likely to be exploited by the lap dancing club industry.
2. **Venues hosting lap dancing less than once a month are exempt:** The proposed legislation exempts venues where lap dancing is held less frequently than once a month. This will exclude a significant number of venues that hold 'lap dancing nights', catered for by a growing number of lap dancing agencies that take bookings in a range of pubs, bars and hotel venues.

### **Object and Fawcett's demands**

There is a clear need and demand for licensing reforms that deliver in terms of local democracy, social justice and equality. Partial regulation – as currently proposed – therefore will not do. In order for licensing reforms to guarantee all communities a greater say in the licensing of lap dancing clubs, it is vital that the legislation is mandatory and universally applied across England and Wales. The legislation must also cover all venues that host lap dancing, however frequently it occurs.

**Support Object and Fawcett's campaign to ensure lap dancing club licensing reforms are comprehensive and robust.**

For further information visit [www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk) or [www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)

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