



## *Introduction*

The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

## Background

**This paper provides a response by the Scottish Women's Convention to the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee's request for written evidence re a further amendment which it considers raises a significant new issue that was not considered in detail during the Stage 1 enquiry.**

*Amendment 516, lodged by Sandra White MSP, seeks to allow local authorities to apply a specific licensing regime to adult entertainment venues, including limiting the number of premises in the local authority area that are permitted to provide adult entertainment.*

## SWC Submission

As the SWC are totally committed to condemning all violence and exploitation of women and children we welcome consideration of this amendment by the Justice Committee and fully support the amendment put forward by Sandra White MSP.

It is our view that 'adult entertainment' is frequently a euphemism for commercial sexual exploitation and it normalises activities which disguise more abusive, controlling and demeaning behaviour towards women. We strongly believe that there is a critical need for a comprehensive review of the powers presently available to local authorities and communities to challenge or limit licences issued to lap-dancing clubs and similar venues.

Current licensing regulations do not provide sufficient controls for lap-dancing and related activities. We would therefore welcome any legislation that embeds greater powers with local authorities to curtail/reduce or otherwise restrict the availability or accessibility of adult entertainment venues.



Local authorities should be provided with the power in law to respond effectively to community resistance to and public concerns about the prevalence of adult entertainment venues in their area. Women who have spoken to the SWC have expressed real concern about the potential these venues provide for other exploitative sexual activities, namely prostitution, being conducted illicitly under the guise of adult entertainment businesses.

Feedback given to the SWC also strongly suggests consideration should be given to extending power sufficiently to enable interested groups to voice their concerns to licencing authorities regarding these establishments, regardless of whether their profile is national or local. Women have told the SWC that the ability of these groups to participate in the decision making process would assist often unprepared communities to formulate and challenge the granting of licenses.

The SWC believe that through legislative intervention local authorities must be provided with the powers to grant licences on the basis of the activity itself. We believe the powers should be focused on the interpretation of 'public entertainment' and do not agree with these establishments being licensed in the same way as entertainment for adults as opposed to something which is not suitable for children.

Finally, the SWC think that any advertising or promotion of jobs in this 'industry' by Job Centres conflicts with the gender equality responsibilities required by public service providers. Local Authorities should therefore be extended the power to exclude this type of advertising in their region of governance to protect women from latent exploitation and abuse.

The effect of conflicting messages when dealing with all forms of violence and exploitation of women must not be ignored. As a society we cannot condone the unlimited licencing of these establishments while rightfully condemning violence against women in our culture.

Should you require any information or further advice regarding this submission please contact Isabelle Lannon, SWC Policy Officer on 0141 248 8186.

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