

# PRESS RELEASE

## OBJECT

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# BORIS URGED TO TAKE A STAND ON LAP DANCING

London's new Mayor will today be presented with the unexpected combination of a strip club pole outside City Hall and a giant-sized letter asking him to lobby the Government on London's behalf for tougher licensing of lap dancing clubs, which are currently licensed in the same way as cafes.

Boris Johnson has pledged to fund 3 new Rape Crisis Centres in the capital and campaign group Object are today calling on him to 'join up the dots' between improving services for survivors of sexual violence and tackling attitudes that contribute to violence against women. Drawing attention to the fact that less than 6% of reported rapes in London end in a conviction and that many hold women responsible for crimes committed against them<sup>1</sup>, campaigners say something is going seriously wrong with attitudes towards women and sexual violence.

Dr Sasha Rakoff, Director of Object, said "We are increasingly saturated with images and practices which say it's ok to see women as sex objects and not as people. A good example of this is the mainstreaming of lap dancing clubs which, thanks to being licensed like cafes, are fast becoming part of our everyday culture. This is of serious concern to organisations that work on violence against women and inadequate licensing laws need to be changed. This is why our campaign, endorsed by a coalition of MPs, peers, councillors, academics and women's organisations calls for lap dancing clubs to be licensed as Sex Encounter Establishments, as peep shows are."

She added "The Mayor wants to make London safer and we are delighted by his pledge to help survivors of sexual violence. We invite him to build on this by drawing a line under public endorsements from Peter Stringfellow and instead helping London's councils achieve better licensing powers for lap dancing clubs. Better services must go hand in hand with tackling attitudes that underpin violence against women."

Dr Nicole Westmarland, Chair of Rape Crisis England and Wales echoed this call saying "Never has there been a more critical time for everyone to work together to say No to sexual violence. It's time to say goodbye to all attitudes, systems, practices and businesses that allow sexual violence to continue. Reclassifying lap dancing clubs is vital in achieving this."

Object's Stripping The Illusion Campaign is calling for closure of a legal loophole which prevents lap dancing clubs from being classified as Sex Encounter Establishments<sup>2</sup>. As a result of the campaign the Mayor is already coming under pressure from the London Assembly to address the issue, facing a written question on the topic from Jenny Jones, Green Party Assembly Member at his first Mayor's Question Time yesterday<sup>3</sup>. A review of stripclub policy recently carried out by Tower Hamlets Council recommended that the council lobby for reclassification of lap dancing clubs and hold a pan-London seminar for local authorities to co-ordinate lobbying efforts<sup>4</sup>.

Chris Green, Director of the White Ribbon Campaign, a male-led campaign challenging violence against women, commented "Any expansion of lap dancing clubs feeds an increase in the lack of respect for women. Men in the White Ribbon Campaign are committed to ending violence against women. As we work for an age when all men understand the implications of their support of these clubs, and they all choose not to attend them, we hope that Boris will support the demand for reclassification of lap dancing clubs."

*For more information or to arrange interviews please contact Sandrine Levêque, Advocacy Officer on 07975 897 005*

## NOTES TO EDITORS

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<sup>1</sup> *Sexual Assault Research* (2005) Amnesty International UK

<sup>2</sup> Sex Encounter Establishments (SEEs) are venues which provide (visual) nude or semi nude entertainment for the purpose of sexual entertainment. A legal loophole means that lap dancing clubs can evade this category by purchasing a Premises Licence to provide late night refreshments and recorded music. Closing this loophole will give local authorities the same licensing powers as apply to sex shops and sex cinemas and allow local authorities and local people to decide on the quantity and location of clubs licensed in their area. Under current legislation local authorities are restricted to 'one size fits all' licensing criteria also used for cafes and karaoke bars. Please see [www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk) for more information.

<sup>3</sup> Question 831 / 2008: "Will you lobby for the reclassification of lap dancing clubs as Sex Encounter Establishments? If so, can you outline what specific steps you intend to take and how you will support local authorities in London who also wish to bring this up with the Government?". A response will be made public by the Mayor's office at the start of next week.

<sup>4</sup> The report can be downloaded at <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/data/your-council/data/works/data/scrutiny/data/reviews.cfm#sc>

With thanks to Julie Bindel, author of *Profitable Exploits* (2004) CWASU, London Metropolitan University for use of 'Stripping the Illusion'