

## **Objection to Spearmint Rhino, Sheffield by Sammy Woodhouse 2018**

This testimony (along with 144 others) can be read at p 669-680 in the Sheffield City Council's Report pack on the licensing of Spearmint Rhino strip club (you may need to copy and paste this link into your browser in order for it to work):

<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/g6975/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2019-Jun-2018%2010.00%20Licensing%20Sub-Committee.pdf?T=10>

### **About me and why I am objecting**

I have already been in contact with Sheffield Licensing about the lap dancing industry, at the time of writing I haven't received a response (see appendix).

My name is Sammy Woodhouse I am an author, fundraiser, campaigner, public speaker and mother of 2, I am also the child abuse survivor that exposed the Rotherham child abuse scandal with The Times news reporter Andrew Norfolk. My work is now focused on and around child/adult exploitation and I work with agencies such as police, councils and government not to only give professionals a better understanding of exploitation but around changing policies, legislation and laws to better the lives of our countries most vulnerable, which brings me to my point of why I am objecting to the licensing renewal of spearmint rhinos.

Lapdancing is exploitation. Due to my work around exploitation I have previously met with then Prime Minister David Cameron, Victims commissioner, Ministry of Justice, Home Office and the lapdancing Minister Victoria Atkinson, I continue to have a working relationship with these individuals and agencies and have or will be discussing my views that I am sharing with you in this objection to improve or abolish lapdancing in the UK. I am also going to have another meeting with the Home Office about the industry.

I am also a former lapdancer so I speak with first hand experience and. I started lapdancing around the age of 18 and danced in the industry for around 9 years all over the UK including clubs in Sheffield.

As a child I was groomed and abused for many years in my home town of Rotherham, this led me to have many issues in life, my self esteem was very low as well as my self respect and I viewed myself as nothing more but an object for men, I believed I was the one in control and felt empowered, I realise now that this is nonsense. I wasn't in control and taking my clothes off for strangers is not empowering it is degrading, I was in fact being exploited by these men and the clubs and the councils that allowed them to operate when I was at my most vulnerable.

Lapdancing is exploitation and is putting women at risk, I have lost count how many times I was touched, grabbed, assaulted physically and sexually and managements response was that it was my job and need to expect it, also we wasn't allowed to report it to police as it would go against the clubs licensing renewal. I was on occasions threatened by managers and on one occasion I was held at a club against my will and told I was getting kidnapped and because they knew where I lived they also threatened to kill my children, the management also sacked every girl that I was friends with.

I have also been assaulted by staff too in order to not report issues within the clubs. Often I was not even paid my wages at the end of the night and told CCTV would be deleted to ensure it looked like I was never even in the premises.

This happened often and around the clubs in the UK. The club owners and management also knew that majority of dancers don't declare they are working or their earnings to HM revenues and take advantage treating the girls badly as they know the girls can't report it for that reason. There is a lot of crime happening also such as drugs and drug dealing, prostitution, fraud, money laundering and trafficking.

In the industry I met some of the most strongest and incredible women, however every dancer I had met in the industry had all experienced some kind of abuse in life like myself emotionally, physically or sexually and most didn't even recognise it as abuse as most don't but they felt they couldn't really do much else. As lapdancers we are viewed very badly. I was constantly called names such as slag, whore and a piece of shit, I was viewed and treated like a second class citizen and not just in 1 club but in all, this made me hate men to an extreme level, they repulsed me.

In one club in particular the atmosphere is very tense, girls are not nice in fact they were very bitchy, they were extreme amounts of girls on which makes it harder to make money but ensures the club makes money as there was a house fee and percentage to pay and if you wanted to work the weekend you had to work during the week also there were student nights which meant we had to do free dances to students etc.

On one occasion I was ill so asked if I could leave early, I was told to go and wait in the changing rooms so I did, whilst I was waiting for the manager I put my coat and boots on as not only was I ill but there was some kind of water leak in the changing rooms and there was water all over the floor, the manager came in and asked me why I had put my coat and boots on without his permission, I was then sacked for doing so and escorted off the premises which was very unfair, the changing room was in extremely poor conditions and I was ill.

The management had favourite dancers so the other girls got treated differently which is common in most clubs. I would also like to point out the dancers dancing in one particular club I'm told still are extremely "dirty" with a lot of contact and spreading of the legs making it even harder to make money as a "clean dancer". I also saw staff bending girls over as if they were having sex with them in a 'joking' way, the girls would just laugh.

On one occasion I went into this particular club as a customer I went outside for a cigarette when I was surrounded by a group of very angry male customers, they were very abusive towards me as they thought I was one of the dancers calling me a slag, whore and telling me my children will hate me and be ashamed of me, it was that bad my friend had to escort me to a taxi to ensure I wasn't attacked physically, unfortunately this happens on a regular basis in fact it is the reason why dancers have to change their name as it protects their real identity being exposed.

The Lapdancing industry is absolutely horrific and needs to be shut down. There should be no such place in our communities for this kind of behaviour and our licensing department should not be condoning it.

In addition to my experiences of the industry, and as a regular visitor to the city, I strongly urge the Council to refuse the licence application under the Discretionary Grounds for Refusal of the current Sheffield City Council's 2018 Sex Establishment Policy ("the Policy") on the ground set forth in the template letter.

## Appendix

My name is Sammy Woodhouse, I am author of *The Sunday Times best seller 'Just A Child'* released 19/4/18, a national speaker, campaigner & fundraiser. I am one of the 1,400 survivors who were groomed, abused and failed in Rotherham.

I was groomed and abused mentally, sexually and physically for many years, made pregnant twice and gave birth to my son when I was 16 years old.

Not only was my rapist psychologically, sexually and physically abusing me, he was also grooming me to commit crime.

In July 2013, I contacted Andrew Norfolk at The Times newspaper and handed over evidence that proved I was abused and also failed by authorities. My story was published, naming Hussain and the deputy leader of Rotherham council in August 2013. This triggered the Professor Alexis Jay report, the inquiry exposed the cover up of 1,400 children being abused and how many authorities had failed in Rotherham and South Yorkshire. I was also the survivor provoked the police investigation (Operation Clover) into my abuse and all other non-recent child abuse cases in Rotherham.

In February 2016, Arshid Hussain was found guilty and sentenced to 35 years in prison.

When I was 18 years old I went to work in the Lap dancing industry. I worked around the UK as a lap dancer for around 9 yrs. I'd like to make clear that I was not forced to work in clubs, it was my own choice. I had a low self-esteem and no respect for myself due to my abuse as a child. I thought at the time I was taking back control and empowering myself, I realise now that taking my clothes off for men's sexual gratification isn't these things but in fact it is degrading, disrespectful and I'm worth much more and so are other women. Myself and others were treated very badly in the industry. I've never met a lap dancer that hasn't at some point in their life been abused mentally, sexually or physically and that's the reason why they are dancers. Their vulnerabilities allow them to become exploited.

Within the industry there is money laundering, fraud, trafficking, prostitution and drugs. This is the reason I will begin a national campaign. Other dancers are also willing to speak out about the treatment they endure in the industry. I aim working and aiming to abolish the Lap dancing industry from the UK.

I'd like to ask men, what if your daughter, mother or grandmother were a lap dancer, would you be ok with it? Women are viewed as sex objects, how many women compared to men are on page 3 or pornographic magazines? How many women, compared to men, are working in Lapdancing clubs? How many women, compared to men, are working in brothels?

I have recently met with the Lap dancing Minister and Home Office about my concerns and we will be working together to tackle the industry.

I would like to meet with yourself to discuss these issues further, as I'm aware there is a Lap dancing venue in your area.

My status includes

- Triggered the Professor Alexis Jay report, which exposed the cover up of 1,400 children being abused and failed in Rotherham. Opening the largest investigation of our time.
- Significant media representation, raising awareness on a worldwide scale.
- Private meetings with PM David Cameron, DfE, Victims Commissioner, a working relationship with MoJ and the Home Office as well as other government officials.
- Secured £3.1million to Barnardo's, from KPMG, RMBC and DFE as well as securing funding for other charities.
- Assisted in training and consultation sessions with multi agencies around the UK and NI including Bedfordshire, Metropolitan police, Tact Fostering, NSPCC, NHS, NCA and Education.
- Supported the development of the commissioned services.
- Participated in the government NHS CSE training film.
- Consultations with leaders and head of children's services at RMBC and Rotherham Commissioners.
- Working alongside RMBC and government amending licensing policies and procedures nationally.
- Nominated for most positive role model award UK, Best Community Safety Award UK, winner of Suzy Lamplugh Safer Campaign award UK.
- Campaigns so far includes - counselling services, mandatory education, CICA, Sammy's Law, licensing, employment changes, legal action against councils, Loose Women's never too late to tell campaign, court system and training for all professionals.

I recently met with the HO and Minister Victoria Atkins to discuss issues around the Lap dancing industry that I have witnessed throughout clubs in the UK such as fraud, money laundering, prostitution, trafficking, drugs and the overall treatment of women within the industry.

I would like to meet with you face to face as I am launching a campaign, with the support of national media, to abolish or at least improve the industry and bring it to the forefront. I feel that with the proliferation of lap dancing clubs it is accepted by society and the use of the women has become a very normalised yet unsafe industry. I believe if we work together we will have a strong chance of achieving my aims.