

Sexual Contact & Sex Acts Rife in Spearmint Rhino Strip Club

Human Rights Groups call for the club to be shut down and performers supported out

“She rubbed the palm of her hand up and down my genitals”

“placed her mouth around my genitals”

“the two performers were masturbating their vaginas .. both regularly touching and grabbing my crotch”

“regularly pressed her breasts into my face”

“masturbated her vagina with her fingers”

Private Investigators have exposed sexual contact and sex acts are rife at Sheffield’s Spearmint Rhino strip club. No sexual contact is the only real ‘rule’ under which strip clubs operate in the UK. But the investigators found numerous dances involved performers extensively touching and masturbating themselves, other dancers and punters. A ‘VIP’ was performers having sex with each other.

This is despite regular spot checks on the club by the Council always showing its operations were ‘clean’ and totally compliant with ‘strict regulations’ designed specifically to prevent sexual contact ‘in order to protect dancers’ welfare’.

“This isn’t about blaming the dancers – which no doubt the club will do instantly” says Dr Sasha Rakoff, CEO of Not Buying It. “This merely exposes what this industry is really about. Dancers have to pay to work in clubs, have to give a portion of their takings back to the club and are fined constantly. The only way they can only make any money at all is through private dances. Clubs always have far too high a ratio of performers to punters. Dancers only get £20 for a lap dance – less with ‘two for one specials’. And both punters and management expect sexual contact and sex acts. It’s not exactly hard to see how the industry is entirely set up so that women essentially have to prostitute themselves in order to have earned any money at all by the end of the night”.

What the PIs found is in keeping with a review of reports, based primarily on hard evidence, showing criminality in over 50 strip clubs across the UK ¹ - 1/3 of the entire strip trade. This shows that sexual contact, harassment and assaults through to drug dealing, underage dancers, pimping and trafficking go hand-in-hand with the strip trade. It is hard to conclude that the industry is nothing more than a ‘feeder’ for the sex trade and all the criminality and abuse that that entails.

The Private Investigators' expose' is just the latest in the ongoing saga of Sheffield City Council's seeming intent on propping up its local strip trade, at any cost. The Council has already lost 2 court cases for breaching equality law in its pro strip industry stance – to the cost of the tax payer of £130,000. At last year's licensing hearing for Spearmint Rhino, it heard evidence from 3 women who had worked in it of the exploitation, harassment, coercion and intimidation rife within the club. Sammy Woodhouse (a highly respected national figure who blew the lid on the Rotherham child grooming scandal) gave evidence in person over the abuse she had experienced when working at the club. All this was ignored and the club was, yet again, re-granted its license.

Sheffield campaigners have long been calling for the club to be shut as incompatible with women's basic safety, let alone equality. The location of the club, essentially 'on campus' of Sheffield Hallam University is particularly inappropriate, especially given that an estimated 1/3 of lap dancers are students.

Women's rights groups are calling for the immediate closure of the club and the dancers - who the Council is directly (and some might argue, knowingly) responsible for putting at risk - supported out with practical and, where needed, emotional support.

And they are urging the public to sign a petition to MPs, Councils and Government calling for an urgent reassessment of the entire strip trade: www.notbuyingit.org.uk/Petition

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¹ Incidences in UK strip clubs: www.notbuyingit.org.uk/StripSleaze