

Members' Room



Town Hall
Reigate Surrey RH20SH

Main Switchboard 01737 276000
Fax 01737 276013

<http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk>

23 Budgen Drive
Redhill Surrey
RH1 2QB

TEL: 01737-767544

10th July 1998

To: Cllr Peter Hopson
Members' Room
Croydon Town Hall

Dear Cllr Hopson,

RE; LICENSING LAP-TOP DANCING.

Further to my letter of the 24th June, to which I have not received a reply, it appears that you and Cllr Maggie Mansell are pressed for time. I will therefore make my points in writing, which may obviate the necessity for the suggested meeting.

Nude dancing (and licensed sex establishments) are lawful in this and all other countries of the European Union. Licensing is solely a regulatory function and should not be used to circumvent the law by imposing prohibition. If a change in the law is desired, appropriate representations should be made to members of the legislature (ie Parliament, not local authority).

The City of Westminster has repeatedly stated that sex establishments should NOT be concentrated in the West End, but should be spread out across Greater London. This is to preserve the traditional character of Soho as a restaurant and delicatessen quarter. I attended a meeting with Lady Porter, when she was Leader of that Council, at which she explained its policy of restricting the number of sex shop licenses eg only two near each railway terminus, because one would constitute a monopoly and more than two a concentration.

Given the attitude of the City of Westminster it is incumbent on other London Boroughs to eschew Nimbyism and take their fair share of the lawful sex industry, including licensed erotic entertainment such as lap-top dancing. Only an Act of Parliament can reverse the attitude of the City of Westminster.

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Such a law would provide the mechanism for the creation of a recognised "red light district" in the capital, to which the sex industry would be confined. Such areas exist in several cities in the European Union eg Amsterdam, Brussels, and Hamburg. (I recommend a visit to one to overcome the insular attitude of "No Sex Please- We're British").

Prostitution could be restricted to such districts. Some Members of Parliament (eg Theresa Gorman) have called for the licensing of brothels in Britain (as happens in some other European Union countries). She did so in 1991 after the cautioning by police and subsequent resignation of Sir Ian Green, the then Director of Public Prosecutions, for importuning prostitutes near Kings Cross Station.

Alternatively the whole sex industry could be criminalised by Act of Parliament, driven underground and operate unregulated outside the law as happens in Islamic States, but in no part of Europe since the fall of communism. The results of such legislation can be gauged from an in-depth visit to or study of such a country. Such a law would be against the European attitude of sexual freedom for consenting adults.

The nannyist idea that adult women (but not men) must be protected from themselves by being prevented from working in the sex industry assumes that they are mentally weaker than males and thus runs counter to the Western concept of gender equality. Legislation based on that idea inevitably results in the imprisonment of prostitutes.

I am a firm believer in local government doing and only doing the regulatory tasks assigned to it by the legislature and not trying to subvert the constitution by misusing the powers vested in boroughs to try and thwart the will of Parliament by changing the desired effect of laws. The question of libertarianism or authoritarianism regarding the sex industry (or anything else) is for Parliament not Borough Councils. If an activity is lawful, subject to the grant of a licence, the appropriate authority has a legal and moral duty to deal with applications for licences in good faith and not misuse the procedure to prohibit the activity, thereby usurping the prerogative of the legislature.

I hope I have adequately explained my concerns to you and Cllr Mansell. If not, either of you can write or phone and I will answer any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr E Goodman

Chair of Licensing Sub-Committee.