

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Licensing Committee
DATE	27 th August 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Sexual Entertainment Venue Policy Consultation 2025
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/25/204
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Jenni Lawson
REPORT AUTHOR	Laura McGhee/Sandy Munro
TERMS OF REFERENCE	16.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To feed back the results of the formal consultation carried out in relation to the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) Licensing Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 consider the results of the public consultation, which closed on Commonplace on 31st July 2025;
- 2.2 determine the appropriate upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen city centre;
- 2.3 determine the appropriate upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues located outwith Aberdeen city centre (but within the Local Authority area); and
- 2.4 determine whether the Committee would like to make any appropriate changes to the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy and standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences in light of the consultation responses, and if so, instruct the Chief Officer – Governance to make the appropriate changes and report a further draft of the policy and standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences back to Committee for approval in due course.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The current Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy is attached as Appendix 1.

- 3.2 The Committee resolved on 3rd December 2019 to licence SEVs, with the policy statement being approved on 14th December 2021 and coming into effect on 1st March 2022.
- 3.3 Members resolved to carry out a formal review of the existing policy at the meeting of 14th May 2025 to establish whether the policy remains fit for purpose and to ensure details such as the numerical limit of premises remains at the appropriate level.
- 3.4 A formal consultation was launched on Commonplace on 24th June 2025 and closed on 31st July 2025 to seek views on a number of points including what the appropriate number of Sexual Entertainment Venues in the city centre should be, whether the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues outwith the city centre should remain at zero, whether people have noticed any impact on the community from the introduction of the licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues, and whether people have any comments on any aspect of the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy or the existing conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences. The full list of consultation questions is set out at Appendix 2. The consultation link was sent to current licence holders, Violence against Women and Girls Partnership and other key stakeholders and was advertised on the Council's website, as well as promoted on the Council's social media channels.
- 3.5 Approximately 188 responses were received.
- 3.6 The first question of the consultation asked what the appropriate number of Sexual Entertainment Venues in Aberdeen city centre should be. Some of the responses are as follows:-
- 1 venue – around 11 responses;
 - 2 venues – around 6 responses;
 - 3 venues – around 6 responses;
 - 4 venues – around 24 responses;
 - 5 venues – around 7 responses;
 - 6 venues – around 38 responses;
 - Other – around 87 responses.
- A chart showing the split of responses is attached as Appendix 3.
- 3.7 If persons responding to the consultation wished to suggest a number of venues falling outwith the options of 1-6, they were asked to select "other" and provide their alternative suggestions. Around 58 people suggested that the appropriate number of Sexual Entertainment Venues in the city centre should be zero. There were around 6 people who suggested that there should be more than 6 venues. There were also a number of people who selected "other" and provided comments suggesting that there should be as many venues as is commercially viable, or as many as there is demand for. People also commented that there should be no cap on the number of venues.
- 3.8 It was asked at question 3 whether the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues outwith the city centre should remain at zero. Around 123 people suggested

yes, and around 61 people suggested no. A chart showing the split of responses is attached as Appendix 4. It was asked if the response is “no” to explain why, and there were a number of people who suggested that if there is demand for these outwith the city centre, why shouldn’t there be such venues. There were also comments suggesting that Policing, CCTV, and lighting can be provided anywhere, so there is no real reason for these venues being city centre only. People also suggested that these types of venues could be in more isolated/rural areas. Further, people suggested that there should be a wider distribution of facilities across the city to enable people to attend without having to travel to the centre. Additionally, there was further suggestion that these types of venues should be accessible to everyone.

- 3.9 It was asked at question 5 whether people have noticed any impact on the community from the introduction of the licensing of Sexual Entertainment venues. Around 137 people suggested no, and around 42 people suggested yes. Again, a chart showing the split of responses is attached as Appendix 5. If people suggested “yes” they were asked to explain what the impact has been. A number of responses indicated that the licensing of such venues puts women at risk and creates the feeling of being unsafe around these venues. There were also comments suggesting that these venues damage community image and normalise unhealthy attitudes of disrespect and violence, as well as objectifying women.
- 3.10 In relation to the consultation question asking whether people have any comments on any aspect of the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy (question 7), the responses were wide ranging. Some comments again suggest that the policy promotes a derogatory view of women (although it is believed this relates to the licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues in general, rather than the policy itself), and that the Licensing Committee should reconsider allowing the licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues at all. There are further comments which suggest such venues undermine community safety, dignity and the city’s image, and create environments where exploitation and violence can thrive. Others have commented that people performing in these venues are reliant on their jobs, and protections for workers are key to the policy. There is suggestion that the rights of the LGBT+ community should be protected as best as possible in the policy, as well as reference to the Transgender and Non-Binary community currently being overlooked. Additionally, there is a suggestion that there should be safeguarding against human trafficking in these venues with a proposed requirement to have regular inspections at each of the premises and for processes to be put in place to ensure human trafficking is not taking place. Further, there is concern around the age limit of performers, which is suggested should be 21 rather than 18.
- 3.11 At question 8 of the consultation, people were asked whether they have any comments on the standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences. There were a couple of comments which indicated that the existing conditions are appropriate and appear satisfactory. However, there are suggestions that there should be a minimum of two members of security staff per 10 entertainers for safety reasons, and there should be a limitation on the number of people permitted to attend the premises at any one time. It has been raised that the information provided to performers should be in their native

language, and that a list of performers should be required as performers are hired and updated as required. It is also suggested that there should be members of security staff at the doors to the premises at all times checking the age of customers. Additionally, it is suggested that the policy can go further to make conditions for workers safer and to ensure that the facilities for the LGBT+ community are equal.

- 3.12 Lastly, in relation to the consultation question asking whether people would like to make any other comments in relation to the existing Sexual entertainment Venue Licensing Policy (question 9), there are a number of comments which take a moral stance on the subject. The existing policy makes it clear from the outset that the Committee does not take a moral stance on SEVs in adopting the policy, rather the role of the Committee is to regulate such venues in accordance with the law. Beyond this, there are comments which suggest that those not operating as a Sexual Entertainment Venue should not be licensed. Further, there are comments which recommend that disability inclusion training should be given to all staff and performers. Additionally, there are comments which indicate that as many performers and staff should be involved with the review as possible. As mentioned above, the consultation link was sent to current licence holders, Violence against Women and Girls Partnership and other key stakeholders, and was advertised on the Council's website and social media channels with a view to seeking as many responses as possible, and for the consultation to reach as many people as possible. There is also a suggestion that there needs to be regular welfare checks on performers at these venues by either Police Scotland or Social Work.
- 3.13 A full list of responses can be accessed at Appendix 6.
- 3.14 A response from an NHS Consultant in Public Health and Organisational Lead for Gender-Based Violence is also attached as Appendix 7. This response was submitted by email rather than through the consultation platform as the NHS Consultant wanted to provide broader context and evidence to the response provided. It is confirmed, however, that the response was provided within the timescales of the consultation being live.
- 3.15 Similarly a response was received from the Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership (VAWGP) and is attached in full as Appendix 8.
- 3.16 Accordingly, in light of the above, and given the wide range of responses, it is believed that a compromise position could be to reduce the upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen city centre from six premises to four premises, with scope to further review this at a future date. This would be more in line with the upper limits for other city centres such as Edinburgh, where the limit is currently three.
- 3.17 Additionally, as the majority of people suggested the upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues located outwith Aberdeen city centre (but within the Local Authority Area) remains at zero, the Committee may wish to consider whether the existing policy should remain unchanged on this point.

- 3.18 It is suggested not to make any amendments to the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy (with the exception of any change to the upper limit of the number of SEVs in each Relevant Locality) or the standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences at this time. Firstly, a number of people who contributed to the consultation have taken a moral stance on the licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues which is reflective in their comments. As set out previously, the existing policy makes it clear from the outset that the Committee does not take a moral stance on SEVs in adopting the policy, rather the role of the Committee is to regulate such venues in accordance with the law. Secondly, the policy should identify the Committee's approach to the regulation of SEVs and the processes to be followed relating to applications for licences of this kind. The policy provides guidance for potential applicants, existing licence holders and members of the public on the licensing of SEVs, and some of the suggestions received through the consultation go beyond what might be covered by the remit of the Committee, and other suggestions would be a matter for Licence Holders to consider when adopting their own venue's procedures. However, the Committee will require to consider whether they wish to make any appropriate changes to the existing Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy and the standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences in light of the consultation responses. If so, officers would require to make the appropriate changes and arrange for a revised version of the policy and standard conditions attached to Sexual Entertainment Venue Licences to be reported back to Committee for approval in due course. It is advisable that there should be scope for further review at a later date.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Where a Council resolves to licence SEVs, licence fees must be set to comply with the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. Aberdeen City Council's current licence fees for SEVs are £441 for the original licence, and £276 for a licence renewal.
- 4.2 A reduction in the upper limit of the number of Sexual Entertainment venues for Aberdeen city centre would result in a very small reduction in licensing fee income, and may result in two vacant premises in the city centre. However, as was specified in our report to committee which took place on 14th May 2025, there is a suggestion that of the six licensed Sexual Entertainment Venues in Aberdeen city centre, at least one of the premises is believed not to be currently operating as an SEV, and another of the premises is currently up for sale.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The current Sexual Entertainment Venue licence for each of the licensed premises in Aberdeen city centre is due for renewal. Accordingly, a decision will require to be made on the upper limit of Sexual Entertainment Venues located in the city centre before any renewal applications can be considered.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified.	N/A	N/A	Yes
Compliance	No significant risks identified.	N/A	N/A	Yes
Operational	The current Sexual Entertainment Venue licence for each of the licensed premises in Aberdeen city centre is due for renewal. Accordingly, a decision will require to be made on the upper limit of Sexual Entertainment Venues located in the city centre before any renewal applications can be considered.	Determine the appropriate upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen city centre.	M	Yes
Financial	A reduction in the upper limit of the number of Sexual	Determine the appropriate upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen	L	Yes

	Entertainment Venues in Aberdeen city centre would result in a very small reduction in licensing fee income in future years.	city centre, with scope for further review at a later date.		
Reputational	<p>Reducing the upper limit of the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues in Aberdeen city centre may cause upset to business owners, in particular. However, it is deemed that the risk is relatively low given one of the premises is believed not to be operating as an SEV currently, and another of the premises is currently up for sale.</p> <p>There may be wider upset amongst the citizens in Aberdeen if the upper limit of the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen city centre remains at</p>	Determine the appropriate upper limit for the number of Sexual Entertainment Venues for Aberdeen city centre and outwith Aberdeen city Centre, with scope for further review at a later date.	M	Yes

	six, as although there are mixed views on the subject, the consultation has demonstrated that a significant number of respondents do not wish the upper limit to remain at 6.			
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified.	N/A	N/A	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.
Community Empowerment Stretch Outcomes	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.
Regional and City Strategies	No significant impact from the recommendations in this report.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	A new Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Current Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing Policy
- 11.2 Appendix 2 – Consultation questions
- 11.3 Appendix 3 – Chart of responses to Q1
- 11.4 Appendix 4 – Chart of responses to Q3
- 11.5 Appendix 5 – Chart of responses to Q5
- 11.6 Appendix 6 – Full list of consultation responses
- 11.7 Appendix 7 – NHS response
- 11.8 Appendix 8 – VAWGP response

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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