

NATIONAL NSW

This was published 2 years ago

# City of Sydney accused of failing to stop illegal sex trade

By [Andrew Taylor](#)

Updated October 24, 2017 – 6.45pm, first published at 3.02pm



A City of Sydney councillor has accused colleagues of not taking the illegal sex trade seriously after his proposal to establish a "proactive inspection regime" failed to win support at a council meeting on Monday night.

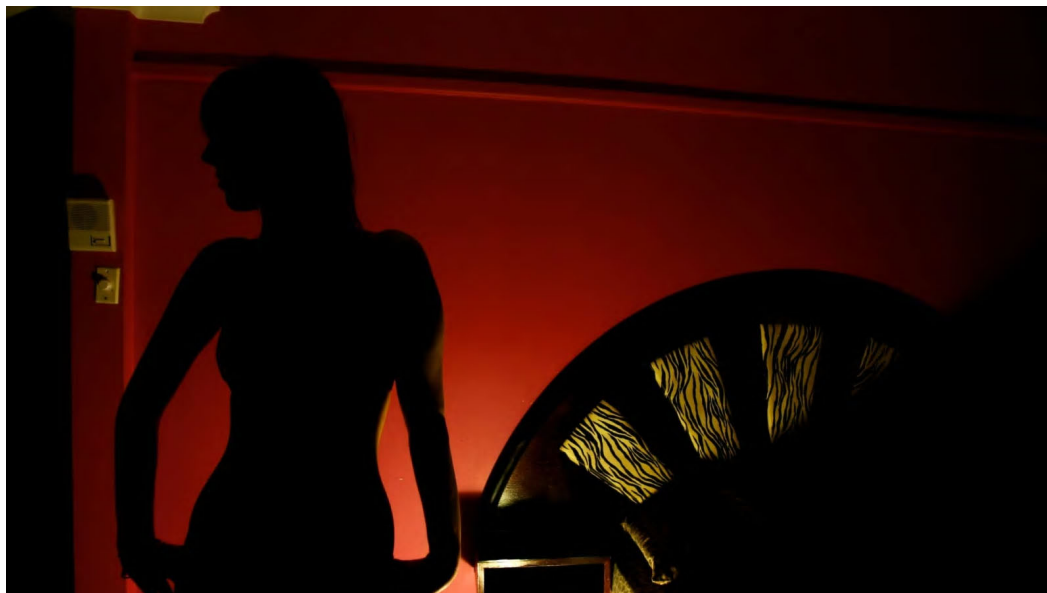
Liberal councillor Craig Chung said councillors allied with the City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore had "shut down the debate" after rejecting his call for action to combat illegal brothels and target sex crime.



The illegal sex trade is flourishing in Sydney, according to Liberal City of Sydney councillor Craig Chung. JACKY GHOSSEIN

"Residents and businesses have been contacting all councillors about this problem and the Clover Moore team just isn't taking it seriously," he said.

"What I don't understand is, why the city conducts proactive inspections of food premises, boarding houses, cooling towers and backpackers but not illegal brothels."



Liberal City of Sydney councillor Craig Chung said he had been contacted by many residents concerned about illegal brothels operating as massage parlours. ANTHONY JOHNSON

But a spokeswoman for Cr Moore questioned whether inspections would lead to more prosecutions.

She said the council had received 43 complaints about illegal brothels in the last financial year - one had led to enforcement action, while nine investigations were ongoing.

"Our advice is that allocating additional resources for proactive inspections of at risk premises is unlikely to significantly increase court action and prosecutions," she said. "There has been no increase in complaints about massage premises over the past five years."

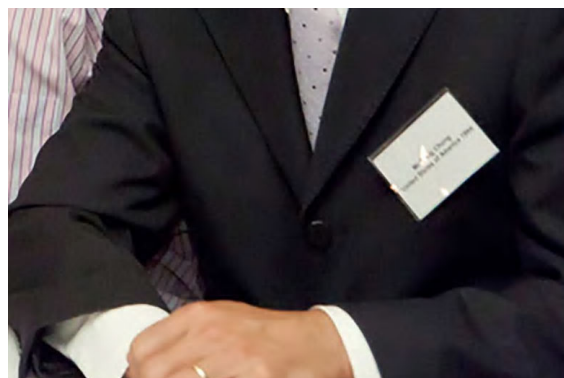
The council has received 290 reports alleging sex was being offered illegally on premises in the past five years - an average of one per week - yet had not launched a successful prosecution, according to Cr Chung's notice of motion.

Cr Chung said he had been contacted by many residents concerned about illegal brothels operating as massage parlours.

He said illegal brothels were "all over the city" in George Street, Pitt Street and Harris Street in Pyrmont where he alleged one operated within metres of the Maybanke Preschool.



"Residents and businesses report the comings and goings of unsavoury types at all hours," Cr Chung said. "Some customers of the massage joints have even walked into the incorrect shop by mistake asking for services."



Liberal City of Sydney councillor Craig Chung.

[Fairfax Media reported in April](#) that complaints about illegal brothels had jumped by more than a third in Sydney since suggested reforms to the sex industry - such as a licensing system and specialist police unit - were blocked by the NSW government last year.

Councils throughout Sydney have struggled to prevent illegal brothels opening alongside schools, learning centres and within residential buildings.

Keith Rhoades, the president of Local Government NSW, [said](#) in 2016: "We have the ridiculous state of affairs in which councils are forced to waste ratepayers' money hiring private investigators to go undercover and actually buy sex from prostitutes to obtain the necessary proof to launch a prosecution."

[Fairfax Media reported in 2016](#) that authorities were powerless to stop Town Hall Massage, an illegal brothel masquerading as a remedial massage centre, from operating at the Maestri Towers residential complex, alongside Town Hall station, in Kent Street.

Cr Chung said the council did not have a "proactive plan" to tackle illegal brothels.

"When a report of illegal sex activity is taking place, the rangers turn up, ask the proprietor if there are sex services being offered, note the sign on the wall that says "No Sex" and then leave," he said. "That's it."

Labor councillor Linda Scott said she also shared concerns about illegal brothels in Sydney.

"We must ensure brothels are legal, regulated, and have the health of their workforce as a priority, rather than taking a heavy-handed approach which can force an increase in illegally operating unsafe premises, which are dangerous for both workers and the community," she said.

Cr Moore's spokeswoman said the council recently had increased resources to investigate complaints and deter massage premises from operating as illegal brothels.

"A new Investigative Specialist was employed in May 2017 and a new strategic approach is being developed to disrupt the business model of massage premises offering unauthorised sex services," she said.

She also said the council supported legal sex premises that conformed with development controls to ensure the health and safety of sex workers.

"All premises must include separate and secure facilities for workers," she said. "All working rooms in brothels must have duress alarms and intercoms so staff can contact reception in case of any incident or concern."

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