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IN THE MATTER OF A SUMMARY REVIEW
UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003

BEFORE THE ISLINGTON LICENSING AUTHORITY

**WITNESS STATEMENT
OF CAMERON LESLIE**

I, CAMERON LESLIE of Fabric, 77A Charterhouse Street, London, EC1M 6HJ will say as follows:

1. I am Cameron Leslie and I am a co-founder and Director at the premises known as 'Fabric'. I make this statement in support of Fabric Life Limited's defence of the Summary Review to be heard at Islington Town Hall on Tuesday 6 September.

My Role

2. I hold a first class degree in International Hospitality Management. Prior to starting Fabric I worked for Hilton Hotels USA and then became a hospitality and leisure consultant with Deloitte and Touche.
3. I founded Fabric in 1999 and initially held the position of General Manager with day to day operational control of the premises. Over time my role has become more strategic than operational and other members of staff now perform the general manager's functions. Nevertheless, despite a change in the ownership structure in June 2010 there has been continuity of management personnel throughout the whole of the Club's life.

Fabric

4. Fabric is a world famous music venue. It has an international reputation that draws large numbers of visitors not only from across the UK, but the world. There are a significant number of people who travel from outside the UK for the primary purpose of attending one of our special one off nights and many foreign visitors to London include a visit to Fabric as a central component of their itinerary.
5. Fabric is popularly regarded as one of the world's best nightclubs. For example, in 2008 Fabric polled as No 1 in DJ Magazine's list of the Top 100 Clubs in the world. Since then Fabric has on four separate occasions (2009, 2013, 2014 and 2015) been voted 'Best Large Club' in the UK in the same magazine's annual British poll. I am very proud of this stellar reputation, as is everyone who works for Fabric. It is a reputation that has been hard earned and that we are all at pains to uphold.
6. The Club's opening on 21 October 1999 was the product of three years work converting the premises at a cost of £7 million. We continue to invest significantly in the club spending approximately £250,000 every two years. This is over and above the £2.5 million combined annual spend on wages for full and part time staff and £1.7million paid annually to DJ's and other artists who perform at the Club.
7. This high level of investment is an indication of our commitment to the highest standards. It enables us to provide not only three top quality sound systems and our pioneering vibrating floor the 'body sonic' but also first class staffing and management and the best medical facilities of any club in London. We employ trained medical staff and have a medical room where those requiring treatment can be looked after. We do not advertise these facilities and only those who end up requiring them are aware of their existence. They are not a selling point but rather an example of our commitment to achieving the highest possible standards across the board.
8. Fabric have evolved from being merely a nightclub. It is a global brand. We offer three different grades of 'Fabricfirst' membership (with a total of 5000 members), have our

own record label through which we have sold 2.5million CDs globally, and every week communicate directly with 900,000 people through various media channels. The Fabric brand has inspired loyalty in our customers as shown in the 100,000+ signatories of the petition to #Savefabric and the 900+ letter of Representation. This loyalty is the result of our commitment to our customers, whose safety and enjoyment is our absolute primary concern.

9. Since its inception Fabric has been at the forefront of the electronic music and nightlife industries. As recently as October 2015 Time Out London wrote “there’s little in terms of quality electronic music that Fabric hasn’t championed in the last 16 years”. Fabric has nurtured a large number of home grown music artists and as consistently maintained its position at the cutting edge of electronic music. This desire to break new ground is integral to the club’s ethos and applies as much to our management as it does to the performances. We are constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of care and service we give to our customers be it when on the dance floor or in any other way. We never wish to settle for second best.
10. Since the premises opened 6,750,000 customers have visited Fabric. The vast majority have had a safe and enjoyable experience.
11. Fabric currently directly employs 250 people with an annualized wage bill of £2.5million. If the premises licence is revoked all staff will lose their employment.
12. We currently contribute £270,000 in rates and levys each year. If the premises is forced to close this financial contribution will be removed to the local economy.

Management

13. This commitment to the highest standards manifests itself also in our approach to how the premises are managed. We are constantly looking to improve how the premises are run.

14. Fabric was first licensed under a justices' licence and public entertainment licence which were converted to a premises licence under the transitional provisions provided for by the Licensing Act 2003. Previously Condition 19 of the premises licence stated:
- “the licensee shall comply with the procedures and practices in the venue operating plan. This plan may be updated sporadically to reflect new operating procedures. A copy of the updated plan should be submitted to the Licensing Authority for approval prior to ratification of the updated plan.”
15. This operating plan has been regularly updated so as to respond to any possible improvements. The most recent version of this was 2011 however the contents of this crucial document, which covered all aspects of managing a premises, including those dealing with management of the queue to the front door, search policies, drug policies, security, steward management and medical provision, were agreed in conjunction with the police and the Licensing Authority. However during the previous review proceedings the licence was further updated to absorb Condition 19 into the main body of the premises licence which is currently exhibited in the current version of the premises licence.
16. We have always complied with the terms of our licence and there is no suggestion that we have ever breached the operating plan. At Fabric compliance with our licence is a minimum standard for operations. We have always been proactive in improving and in responding to requests and initiatives over and above the requirements of our licence. For example in the last month we have agreed to carry out Police dog training for the City of London Police who have used our venue previously as a live training environment. Indeed, compliance with our licence is only a “benchmark” for operations. We have always been proactive in improving and in responding to requests and initiatives.
17. We have the highest annual security bill and the highest ratio of security guards to patrons of any venue in the UK.

18. Where an issue has arisen we have responded cooperatively and have made a concerted effort to address a perceived problem. For example, in 2011-2012 the Police's focus in meetings with us was directed towards acquisitive theft taking place in the venue. 95% of this was mobile phone theft. I explained that some of the reported thefts of mobile phones may not have been thefts but rather were lost phones reported as stolen for insurance purposes. We nevertheless sought to address the problem handing out a flyer on phone theft to those in the queue, highlighting the issue on our blog and website, opening up a dedicated lost property area, bringing in undercover spotters to keep an eye on potential theft and requiring all staff to wear "is your phone safe" t-shirts. We shared these initiatives with other operators and several of them have subsequently been adopted by other venues.
19. When in September 2013 Commander Chisty, the Metropolitan Police lead officer on Alcohol crime, visited the premises unannounced during operation Condor, he stated that the clubs procedures were "an example of best practice".
20. As mentioned above, Fabric looks to be a market leader driving change across the industry. I, along with others from Fabric, was personally instrumental in setting up the local Club and Pubwatch. Fabric has chaired the Pubwatch since its inception and I am proud to say we are the main drivers behind the group. We were the only licensed premises to be part of an independent advisory group for the City of London Police and regularly attended meetings between 2003 and 2006 when this group, consisting of representatives from amongst others, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the City of London Police Committee, the Association of Disabled Professionals and representatives of the Church including the Arch Deacon of London, still existed. We have supported and continue to support the London Borough of Islington in promoting the nighttime economy through Purple Flag, a national award (like the blue flag for beaches) which recognizes good management of town and city centres at night. Islington Council always include Fabric in the venues the assessors for Purple Flag should attend and we have been wholehearted supporters of the initiative seeking to drive up standards at other venues within the Borough.

21. From the above I hope it is clear that Fabric is not just a well-run nightclub; it is a market leader not only in the quality of the entertainment it provides but also in its management. It seeks to be the gold standard against which other nightclubs may be judged.

Drugs

22. Drugs are an issue for all nightclubs. From our very first days we have worked cooperatively with the licensing authority and with the Police to tackle this problem as best we can. Barry Leach (the Police Licensing Officer when we opened) asked us to be open and transparent with our drug search, collection and retention policies. We have always been open and transparent. Through working together with the Police we have refined our search policies and I am delighted to say that the amount of drugs being brought into the club has been significantly reduced. This is exhibited in our logs of seized drugs which the Police have access to.
23. It is a sad but unavoidable fact that it is not possible to remove all drugs from circulation within a nightclub. And even if it were, people would still attend the venue having taken drugs prior to their arrival. It is for this reason that Fabric fights the battle with drug use on two fronts: prevention **and** harm mitigation.
24. The first (prevention) involves providing a strong message that we have a zero tolerance policy in relation to drugs at Fabric. We ensure this through our style of operation, our advertising and our PR campaigns. We run a scrupulous door policy. 100% of our customers are searched on entry to the maximum permitted extent. Any more invasive investigation (for which there would have to be solid grounds) would require a comprehensive search of intimate body parts which can only be carried out by a qualified person following the detention of the suspect. None of our competitors search 100%. We search all of our Acts and again none of our competitors search any of their Acts.

25. Nevertheless, it is unavoidable that some drugs evade detection. Moreover there will be customers who have taken drugs prior to their arrival at the premises.
26. It is for this reason that we have invested in providing first class medical facilities to those who attend our club. As stated above, this takes the form of a medical room and trained medical personnel. Our approach on this front is both proactive and reactive. All our staff are trained to look for people who are displaying the signs of intoxication through drink and / or drugs. They will approach anyone who appears to need help or time to recover by taking them outside for some air where appropriate or else seeking medical assistance. Having looked into the procedures in place at competing venues we go significantly further in our proactive and responsible approach to caring for those who may have taken drugs than does any other venue I have visited.
27. Despite all of the above there are regrettably occasions where we simply were not able to avoid the consequences of drug use. Fabric customers have died as a result of drug overdoses. The seriousness with which we treat this issue should not be underestimated. Fabric is a community and we are deeply troubled when a member of that community loses their life to drugs. We are eager to do everything that we possibly can to avoid this happening and it is for this reason we put in place what I believe to be the best procedures in London (if not the world).
28. As part of our ongoing efforts to combat drug use by our customers we have employed a leading researcher, Professor Fiona Measham, a professor of criminology at the school of Applied Social Sciences in Durham, to help us understand current trends and issues in drug taking and how to respond to them. Deaths at the venue have brought into sharp focus the need to be at the absolute vanguard in this field and it is hoped that her research in partnership with Fabric will help further the fight against this problem. We will of course share any data that she produces with the Islington authorities, the Metropolitan Police Service and the Home Office in the hope that we can help other venues to improve how they respond to this important issue.

29. However, as long as people continue to decide to take drugs recreationally there is an extent to which drug use amongst our clients is unavoidable. Our aim is to respond to that responsibly and to do everything we can to minimize it. We are very concerned that measures should not be put in place which, despite their superficial attractiveness, in reality place our customers at greater risk of harm. Drugs Dogs are just such a measure.
30. We have trialed the use of drug dogs at the premises with two different companies. On the night of 29 November 2014 the drug dog indicated 35 people. Of these 35 people there were 9 seizures. We have looked into each of these seizures and are satisfied that on each occasion our own searches would have found the drugs that were seized without the use of the dog. During the same period security searches were carried out where there were no dog indications and 11 seizures were made from people who had passed the drugs dog.
31. Similarly on 29 August 2015 the drug dog indicated 19 people. Of these 19 people there were 2 seizures. We have looked into each of these seizures and are satisfied that on each occasion our own searches would have found the drugs that were seized without the use of the dog. During the same period security searches were carried out where there were no dog indication and 21 seizures were made from people who had passed the drugs dog.
32. This evidence strongly suggests that drug dogs are certainly no more (and in all probability less) effective than our robust current security searches.
33. There is however a very significant downside to the use of drugs dogs. This is at the heart of the objection to the condition requiring the use of drugs dogs. Where individuals are aware that drugs dogs are in operation there is a habit amongst drug users to take all of the drugs they intend to prior to attending the venue. This is perceived to be a means of avoiding detection. We have been told by Professor Measham that the result is an increased risk of overdose. Where a drug user takes all of their drugs at once the chance of overdose is substantially greater. Using drugs dogs

could if anything increase the number of serious drug related emergencies at the club. Whilst there is little if any benefit to introducing drugs dogs at Fabric there is a very real disbenefit.

34. Additionally, as is borne out from the figures from our trials, drugs dogs are simply not reliable. They make false positive identifications. The condition proposed would therefore require that we exclude for no good reason customers whom we have searched and found not to be in possession of drugs, along with the rest of their party. This cannot be right and would be severely disproportionate.

Police stance/evidence on Summary Review

35. The stance and evidence presented by the Police is not the venue we know nor recognize from our day-to-day management. We have multiple layers of covert and overt surveillance who report back to the Directors independently and while we receive considerable information on a weekly basis upon which we fine tune our procedures. We also correct and change and praise or discipline staff on the reports we receive. The veracity and volume of complaints in the Police statements is not consistent with the picture we get. I should point out that the police are judging this on a snap shot where as we review procedures constantly and on a weekly basis. Furthermore we have had an independent consultant, an ex-Police Licensing Inspector, who's reports do not paint the same picture. We wholeheartedly do not accept the Police stance of endemic failure. We believe this to be grossly unfair and a misrepresentation of our operation and team.

36. I was deeply concerned at the first police meeting that we had when Ian Graham, the head of London's Central Licensing Unit said "It's the whole operation which allows this to take place. It is the way everything comes together, there is something seriously wrong with the operation."

37. We do not believe that the history and track record of operation of these premises, nor the current operation is reflective of this comment.

Cost of Closure and additional Security Measures

38. We chose to remain closed during the period from the launch of the review to its final hearing. This was because we thought it was imperative that we had the opportunity to discuss these issues with the Police and Licensing Authority and formulate our offer for remedial action. This has come at a significant cost to the business which is set out in the following paragraphs.

39. Costs of closure

- Costs of closure for six weeks - £396,000
- Legal and professional costs - £45,000

Additional security measures

- ID scan hardware - £21,909.60
- Active CCTV system - £10,500
- Lighting upgrade - £2,140
- Electricians and labour costs estimated - £7,500
- Total anticipated capital costs: £42,000

Extra staffing on a trading session

- Search captains - £330 per night
- Toilet staff increase - £142.56 per night
- ID Scan attendant x 3 - £356.40 per night
- Additional entrance security staff x 3 - £402.60 per night
- Additional entry cloakroom and cashier staff - £155.52 per night
- Independent security auditor - £350 per night
- CCTV monitoring staff - £176 per night
- Total anticipated annual increased cost: £300,000

Offer of modification to Premises Licence and suspension

40. We have given serious consideration to the issues that have arisen and brought about the police's view that the Premises Licence needs to be revoked. We are certain that this is a disproportionate sanction and would not be appropriate in the circumstances but have the following offer to make in relation to the issues that have been highlighted.

That the Premises Licence be suspended until Thursday 15th September with the premises reopening on Friday 16th September. The suspension to allow for the changes to recruit additional staff, management supervision, re-training of staff on new search policies and heightened drugs policy, introduction of new CCTV system and I.D scan.

41. On core club nights (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) I.D scan will be introduced at the premises and implemented on the front door and all points of entry. A policy of "no I.D no entry" will accompany this system unless customers have pre-registered by biometric options on the system.
42. Whilst it cannot be a condition on the Premises Licence the Premises Licence holder has identified certain club nights/events which have been in operation at the premises when customers have died and will amend their offer from time to time and in conjunction with The Loop ("The Loop").
43. The Premises Licence holder will undertake searching and supervision of the premises in line with the attached policy.
- a. A new search policy/procedure will be produced. Any member of staff found not to be complying with this will be summarily dismissed for breach of contract.
 - b. There will be a significant training package for all new employees and all existing employees will be retrained. Police/Licensing Authority representatives are invited to attend the training session.
 - c. Training will also be focused on the intervention by staff in potential issues within the club.

- d. An independent (to Saber Security) auditor will monitor all security staff and Fabric staff. A report will be prepared and provided to the Premises Licence holder.
 - e. A covert team will be employed to test the veracity of staff and door supervisor systems and this will be circulated to key management staff on a weekly basis.
 - f. Improved sight lines and raised podiums will be introduced to ensure that all areas within the club premises are supervised. A plan is attached.
 - g. There will be double staffing in the toilets and the toilets will be under constant monitor/supervision. No more than single occupancy will be permitted in the cubicles. There will be signage to this effect within the toilets. Any customer found to breach this policy will be excluded.
 - h. In the rear smoking area the barriers will be repositioned so that staff members do not need to go through the barriers to reach their lockers. (There is a suggestion that people were seen entering through the rear of the smoking which would be a breach of licence conditions. Having checked the CCTV these were staff members going to their lockers. To remove any potential confusion moving forward the barriers and perimeter staff member will be repositioned).
 - i. Body worn cameras to be deployed in external queue areas not in direct eye line of the front door to remove weak areas for supervision.
 - j. Active CCTV monitoring (using PTZ cameras in venue and smoking area - see plan). A new/additional member of staff will be employed in the CCTV room to monitor cameras and instruct security staff.
 - k. Lighting to be changed following consultant audit to improve sightlines within the venue (see proposed plan - may change depending on live tests).
44. The drugs policy attached to the Premises Licence will be complied with throughout the premises and publicised thoroughly on the website and at the premises.
- a. To be publicised there will be active ejection of everyone found in possession of drugs no matter how small an amount.

- b. The key message of heightened protocols on drugs will be placed on the Fabric website, in literature at the premises and communicated to all on the Fabric database.
 - c. In the toilets any services which allow for drugs to be ingested will be replaced by surfaces which will not allow drugs to be taken.
45. Whilst it cannot be a condition on the Premises Licence the Premises Licence holder is keen to continue to reinforce their partnership working with police and would promote and pay for a police drugs operation with police indicator dogs in and around the vicinity of the premises to act as a deterrent.

Conclusion

46. Fabric is a world-leading nightclub both in terms of entertainment and management. It has been at the vanguard of improving the way London nightclubs are run. In the past we have always complied with the terms of our licence and have taken on board the suggestions of the licensing authority and the Police, as well as making our own improvements to the running of the club. The conditions to which this appeal relates, however, are inappropriate and worse than unnecessary.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

Signed: _____

Cameron Leslie

Dated: _____