

Gambling Act 2005 - Statement of Principles - Consultation

In response to this consultation I would offer the following comments.

1. Gambling is **highly addictive and potentially very damaging** for many individuals. For example it is estimated (Government figures) that:
 - Between **117 and 496 suicides** are associated each year with problem gambling.
 - Around **3.3 million gamblers are debt** – the average debt is **£10,000**.
 - 0.5% (over **300,000**) of all adults are **problem gamblers** i.e. seriously addicted and gambling is damaging their well-being, health and livelihood
 - 3.8% of all adults (over **2.5 million**) are at **serious risk** of becoming addicted
 - 7.0% of the population (over 5 million) is being **negatively affected** by the addiction to gambling of other people. This includes partners, children, parents and employers
 - Whereas most gamblers are in employment and enjoy a decent standard of living, the **majority of problem gamblers** are unemployed or in low paid jobs and **live in the poorest communities**.
 - The highest rates of problem gambling are in the **North West** and North East.

In view of the above, the Council should take every step possible to tackle this activity which is causing unspeakable (and often hidden) harm to our local communities. The local council and its statutory and voluntary sector partners should treat this addiction with the same seriousness as they do drug or alcohol addiction.

The gambling industry is extremely big business:

- Annual revenues are approximately **£15.1 billion** including the national lottery.
- Annual revenues excluding National lottery is approximately £10.95 billion
- These revenues have increased from £6.3 billion in 2013 to £15.1 billion in 2023
- The gambling industry contributes around £7.1 billion to the economy and pays roughly £4.2 billion in taxes.
- The industry has been successful in lobbying politicians and creating advertising campaigns which describe gambling as a **choice** and encourage customers to **enjoy responsibly**. **This approach hides the damage that gambling is doing to families and communities. It mirrors the way smoking and alcohol have been branded in the past.**

The Council should follow the approach highlighted in 'Tackling Gambling Related harm: A Whole Council Approach'. This includes:

- Problem gambling being **championed as a whole council priority** by **Councillors and the Executive**
- Serious and **meaningful compliance checks** of gambling premises
- **Training for frontline staff** on recognising and recording problem gambling and its affect/contribution to the issues they are dealing with including:
 - ✓ How to talk about problem gambling in a non-stigmatising way
 - ✓ How to signpost/refer affected people to services such as the NHS gambling clinics
- The Council and its partners to **collect and analyse data to recognise trends, hotspots, demographics**.
- The Council and its partners to **adapt and fine tune services** in the light of this analysis.

In conclusion, the statement of principles and strategy should start from the premise that gambling is unhealthy and bad for our community. Although it is allowed, the Council and its partners should not encourage it. They should take all decisions from this viewpoint. It is no accident that poorer areas like Hyndburn are over-served by the gambling industry and there are so many 'bookies' in Accrington town centre.

I will be happy to discuss this and any related matters to the officers responsible.

Councillor Shabir Fazal OBE