

TITLE OF REPORT: OSC Review on the impact of Gambling on the Borough**REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Communities and Environment**

SUMMARY

The Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of the impact of gambling in Gateshead as part of the 2016/17 programme. This report provides the Committee with an update on progress with the recommendations made.

Background

1. The Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of the impact of gambling in Gateshead as part of the 2016/2017 programme.
2. The review drew on local and national evidence focusing on:
 - **Gambling in Gateshead** – the distribution, types and number of premises licensed for gambling and how this has changed over time; the types of gambling taking place in the borough
 - **The legal framework for regulation of gambling and the role of the regulators** - the Gambling Act 2005 and the respective roles of the Gambling Commission and Gateshead Licensing Authority; the impact of other regulatory regimes on gambling activity
 - **Local and national concerns about gambling** - evidence and observations from local and national regulators, operators, trade bodies, treatment providers, charities and public agencies
 - **Developing research evidence on gambling related harm** - a review of recent developments and best practice and how it can be used in Gateshead to minimise gambling related harm.
3. Four evidence gathering sessions of the OSC took place between September 2016 and January 2017. During the review the Committee heard evidence from:
 - Officers from Gateshead Council (including Licensing Officers, the Public Health Team, the Community Safety Team, and Safeguarding Adults)
 - The Gambling Commission - the body responsible for granting operating and personal licences for commercial gambling operators and personnel working in the industry
 - Gamcare - an independent national charity providing information, advice, support and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

4. The evidence gathering sessions identified the following issues:

- There are a relatively small number of premises licensed for gambling in Gateshead and the number of premises has remained largely stable since the Gambling Act 2005 came into force. They are however a prominent feature of the main shopping areas of the borough which is a common theme across the nation.
- It was recognised by the Committee that a huge amount of gambling goes on in the borough which is outside of the control of the Council as licensing authority including the National Lottery, scratch cards and online gambling. The potential amount of money that goes out of the borough through this route is a matter of concern. The amount of promotion and advertising of gambling on television is also a matter of concern.
- The review highlighted the increase in the prevalence of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals and identified that there are potentially 168 of these in Gateshead's 42 licensed betting premises. It also highlighted the concerns from many different bodies about these machines.
- The review examined the national debate around the limitations of the evidence available to establish causal links between FOBTs and problem gambling and addiction to gambling highlighted the wide range of initiatives, schemes, research and inquiries which are currently being carried out to further understand the concerns raised.
- The review examined the available data sources about problem and at-risk gambling and their relation to the borough of Gateshead. It also highlighted to members the known risk factors associated with problem and at-risk gambling and the kinds of harm they are more likely than other people to experience.
- Members were advised however that while a wide range of local agencies services and bodies were approached to provide evidence on the extent of gambling related harms in Gateshead there was simply none available. It is apparent that there does not currently exist a mechanism to record and measure problems caused by gambling in our local community, and none were able to provide local statistics about specific problems, nor the number of individuals or families affected by them.
- Members heard a presentation from Rob Burkitt, the lead for Shared Regulation and Better Regulation at the Gambling Commission. Rob set out the role of the Gambling Commission and an overview of its priorities for 2016/2017. Members recognised the importance of the working relationship between the Commission and the Council and were keen for it to continue.

- Members were informed about some work commissioned in 2015 by Westminster and Manchester Councils to explore what area-based vulnerability to gambling related harm might look like.
- Members received a presentation from the learning and development Manager of Gamcare an independent national charity providing information, advice, support and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

Final recommendations of the OSC review .

5. The final recommendations of the OSC's review of the impact of gambling in Gateshead were:
 - (1) The Council should use every opportunity to contribute to the national debate about the harms that can be caused by irresponsible and problem gambling.
 - (2) The Council should continue to develop its productive working relationship with the Gambling Commission.
 - (3) The Council should contribute to the continuing debate and proposed consultations on the harms associated with fixed odds betting terminals.
 - (4) The Gambling Commission's introduction of Local Area Risk profiles represents a new opportunity for Gateshead Council to think more deeply about the protection of vulnerable people from gambling-related harm. The Council should develop Local Area Risk Profiles for the borough.
 - (5) Gateshead Council as a licensing authority should examine the range of data available locally and evaluate how this can be used in Local Area Risk Profiles.
 - (6) Gateshead Council as a licensing authority should also begin to consider what data and evidence is missing and establish closer working links with other services within the Council and with partner agencies to develop a better knowledge base and a better range of data
 - (7) That further update reports be provided to the OSC on a regular basis.

Update on progress with the recommendations

6. A meeting between the Gambling Commission and Gateshead Council took place on 17 October 2017 as part of the Commission's ongoing engagement plan with local authorities. The focus of the meeting was on Gateshead Council's approach to gambling matters including inspections and enforcement, what sort of issues the Elected members are concerned about, and the work plan for next year – in particular about the review of statement of principles (ready for 2019). A further informal meeting took place on 7 February 2018 at the LGA Licensing Conference in London.

7. The Gambling Commission are also attending the next meeting of the North East Strategic Licensing Group (NESLG) Chaired by Elaine Rudman on 10 April 2018. Rob Burkitt (Lead – Shared Regulation and Better Regulation) and Mel Potter (Compliance Manager) will be providing advice and guidance to all of the 12 licensing authorities in the region about the required review of our Gambling Statement of Principles.
8. Gateshead Council responded to the Government's Consultation on Proposals for Changes to Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility Measures in January 2018. Central to the consultation was the issue of the current maximum stakes of £100 on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) which many argue are linked to gambling related harm. Gateshead Council supported the widespread view expressed in the call for evidence for a reduction in stake limits for FOBTs to £2. The Gambling Commission published its recommendations on 19 March 2018 proposing a maximum stake of £30 or below for these machines. The Government is currently considering all of the consultation responses.
9. Plans are underway for the review of the Council's Gambling Statement Statement of Licensing Principles. The new Statement must be in place by January 2019. A programme of drafting, consultation and reporting is currently being planned.
10. Gateshead Council's Director of Public Health has expressed an interest in participating in the review of the Statement of Principles with a view to firmly embedding public health in Gateshead's approach to the licensing and enforcement of gambling activities in the borough. The Gambling Commission have again offered to come and talk to Gateshead and other public health team that have expressed a similar interest and Gateshead is going to host a meeting in the next couple of months.
11. Newcastle University approached the Council last year looking for projects for their post grad planners. Following discussions they began a project in October involving research around gambling in Gateshead based on the framework presented in the Geofutures work commissioned in 2015 by Westminster and Manchester Councils to explore what area-based vulnerability to gambling related harm might look like. They presented their final report on 8 January 2018 and consideration is currently being given to a further project building on this work.

Recommendation

12. The Committee is asked to note the progress that has been made.

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