

Problem Gambling in Leeds - Briefing Note of the Financial Inclusion Team

Introduction

In May 2013 Leeds City Council granted a licence to Global Gaming Ventures (GGV), to develop a large casino as part of the Victoria Gate development scheme in the city centre. This casino will be the fourth large casino in Britain, and it is expected to open early in 2017.

On being granted the licence and as part of an agreement under Schedule 9 of the Gambling Act 2005, GGV committed to undertaking a wide range of benefits, including commitments to employment, training, mitigating problem gambling, environmental principles and the physical development of the casino.

As part of the Schedule 9 Agreement the casino operators agreed to financially contribute to a Social Inclusion Fund, with an initial upfront payment received in 2013 and subsequent annual payments once the casino is open. Funding received prior to casino opening is to fund projects and initiatives that support the city's anti-poverty agenda. Once the casino is open and for the duration of the licence, monies will also fund projects that mitigate potential harmful social effects of gambling.

In addition to the financial contributions to establish and maintain the Social Inclusion Fund, GGV also agreed to provide fees to establish a robust system of monitoring, management and mitigation. This is to ensure that the social and health risks are closely monitored to alleviate any potential harmful social effects of gambling. As part of the Schedule 9 agreed benefits certain elements of GGVs performance will be easily monitored as there are systems in place, such as employment and training, and compliance with the licence, and issues around crime and disorder. However, it was recognised that there is a current lack of knowledge and understanding about the scale and impact of problem gambling in the city. Therefore in April 2016 the Council commissioned a team from Leeds Beckett University (LBU), to conduct a study into the prevalence of problem gambling in Leeds to help understand the issues involved.

Aims of the research

To establish the prevalence of problem gambling and assess how it impacts on the lives of people in Leeds. In order to ensure that the Council is in an informed position to discuss the needs of those struggling with problem gambling, and that support services are resourced and targeted towards those most in need.

Overview of findings

The study found that gambling opportunities in Leeds are widespread, mixing gambling, gaming and social and leisure activities in diverse and widely distributed premises. While the 'supply' side of gambling opportunities is well developed in Leeds, the study suggests provision for support services for those at risk of gambling related harm is under-developed and fragmented.

The scale of the problem

National evidence shows that problem gambling affects less than 1% of the population. Depending on the survey considered, rates of problem gambling tend to vary between 0.5% and 0.9% of adults in Britain.

Some studies have also looked at the number of people 'at risk' of gambling problems. At risk generally refers to people who are experiencing some difficulties with their gambling behaviour but are not considered to be problem gamblers. Estimates suggest that between 5% and 6% of people in Britain may be at risk gamblers. Measuring at risk gamblers is not the same as measuring those who experience harm but both recognise that more people than just problem gamblers can be negatively affected by gambling.

The estimates are national averages and cover widely different social groups. Successive studies have shown that certain groups are more likely to experience gambling problems than others. These include men, younger people, those unemployed, adults from certain minority ethnic groups, and also those living in more deprived areas.

This research estimates problem gambling rates in large metropolitan areas like Leeds are broadly twice the national average. It also estimates that the at-risk rate is broadly similar to national rates.

The impact of the problem

The study interviewed a small cross-section of problem gamblers, those at risk and others post-treatment, drawn from a range of activities and circumstances. Their stories revealed how losses were funded through overdrafts, family loans and informal borrowing, and, for one individual, a loan shark. Gambling behaviour commonly affected relationships amongst friends and family, and for some was seen to have underpinned relationship breakdowns. Some of the participants reported health and wellbeing impacts, often with depression associated with an inability to cope, anxiety and shame.

Current Support Available

In Leeds the supplier of specialist services related to gambling related harm and problem gamblers is the North East Council for Addictions (NECA) who holds the contract for Leeds (together with York, Scarborough and Whitby) on behalf of GamCare, for referrals, advice and treatment. The service is nationally funded by the Responsible Gambling Trust (RGT), through GamCare, with finance raised through a voluntary industry levy which underpins RGT funding. GamCare are a UK-based charity and the leading provider of information, advice, support and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

NECA is the sole agent in Leeds for specialist support to identified problem gamblers, focussing on counselling geared at self-referred clients and with most referrals coming from GamCare's national helpline. NECA has been operating in Leeds since 2008 but the study revealed there are extending waiting lists of 4-6 weeks, and capacity falls short of need.

Separate from NECA, Leeds has a strong established independent advice network that would be well placed to provide some support and guidance in this area. Many of these services have some exposure to clients affected by gambling related harm, usually when combined with more mainstream demands on debt management, alcohol or drug addiction and recovery support. Most service agencies are keen to offer further help but lack any screening or assessment tools which can identify gambling related harm at an earlier stage.

How the research will be used

The research highlighted key areas in which the Council and partners can work together to help mitigate gambling related harm in Leeds. This would require an integrated approach between the Council, Advice partners and the Gambling Industry to raise awareness of how to recognise, help, signpost and support those suffering from or at risk of gambling related harm.

The final research by Leeds Beckett University is to be launched early 2017, at a national conference held in the city. In order to progress this work, a project group is being established which is bringing together partners from the gambling industry, third sector advice agencies and a cross section of departments from the Council. The initial findings of the report have been shared with partners who are keen to work together with NECA and develop a co-ordinated approach to improve and strengthen the support available to problem gamblers and at-risk groups in Leeds.