

Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities)

Statement: Reducing Gambling Harm

For consideration: 2 March 2023





Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board 2022/23



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(Chair)



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Cllr Trish Smith



Cllr Eleanor Thomson



Cllr John Tudor



Cllr Paul Wadsworth

Reducing Gambling Harm

Background: On 20 January 2023 the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) held a consultative meeting to explore the local approach to reducing gambling harm.

Attendees: The meeting brought together officers with expertise in licensing, public health and financial inclusion, along with a representative from the NHS Northern Gambling Service. Cllr Mary Harland attended in an Executive capacity and Cllr Abigail Marshall-Katung attended in her capacity as the Chair of the Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board.

Recommendation: The Executive Board is asked to consider the conclusions of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) as set out in this report. In line with the Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules, the Executive is asked to provide a response to the Scrutiny Board indicating what action (if any) it proposes to take and to publish its response.

Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board
Focusing on services affecting the lives of citizens living and working in the council's neighbourhoods to monitor progress as a citizen focused city and prioritising environmental sustainability.

Key Conclusions

1

Gambling harm should be regarded as a matter of public health, which risks exacerbating existing inequalities in Leeds. The Board recommends that a prevention and intervention strategy is adopted similar to those adopted in response to public health concerns linked to tobacco and alcohol use. This requires a joined up multi-agency approach locally and nationally — including services such as financial inclusion, public health, housing and licensing, working in partnership with government, health, education and third sector organisations, operators, regulators and treatment providers.

2

As part of a prevention and intervention strategy the Board recommends the Executive Board explores how to support the expansion of work to raise awareness of the harms associated with gambling within communities, to reduce the stigma associated with gambling harms and promote ease of access to support and treatment.

3

Early intervention and communication programmes in schools and other education settings should be a key part of the city's preventative approach to gambling harm. The Board welcomes ongoing efforts to support schools by providing the information, tools and teaching materials necessary to engage pupils in conversations about gambling harm. The Scrutiny Board recommends that such programmes should begin in primary school.

4

Regulatory structures have not kept up with changes in the UK gambling sector, particularly with regard to online gambling. The Board recommends lobbying the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to reform regulatory structures — for example, to bring 'loot boxes' in video games within the scope of regulatory legislation and to prevent companies from targeting vulnerable people they know cannot afford the bets they are placing.

5

The Board further recommends that the Executive lobbies Government to identify mechanisms through which exposure to gambling products can be reduced—including through the introduction of a ban on gambling firms advertising on sports kits and at sports venues. The Scrutiny Board would be happy to provide support as part of that process.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

Current approach

The Scrutiny Board welcomed the advice, expertise and ongoing activities being delivered by a range of Council services and partners to tackle the extensive and varied harms associated with gambling.

Members highlighted 2016 research into the extent of gambling related harm in Leeds, and the subsequent establishment of NHS Northern Gambling Service and GamCare's Leeds Community Gambling Service on Council premises, as examples of effective local partnership. The Board also welcomed the inclusion of questions relating to gambling in the 'My Health, My School' survey of young people.

Several examples of best practice were shared with the Scrutiny Board including the establishment of Leeds Gambling Harms Group, and partnership work between Public Health and Financial Inclusion with a number of services and agencies, including NHS Northern Gambling Service, Leeds Community Gambling Service and Young Gamblers and Gamers Trust. The Scrutiny Board is keen to explore how current practice can be developed further and in order to benefit communities in, and citizens of, Leeds.

Public Health

Members heard evidence about the health, social and economic harms experienced by individuals, their families and local communities, and noted that gambling harm is often 'hidden' due to the associated stigma. Members noted that not everyone that participates in gambling suffers harm. However, the Board explored the particular challenge of tackling social acceptability in relation to gambling and the scale of the global industry facilitating gambling.

Members concluded that gambling harm should be regarded as a public health matter that requires a multi-agency response at both a local and national level. Members endorse the partnership work already taking place in Leeds through the Leeds Gambling Harms Group and Leeds' work with Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) at a regional level. Scrutiny members endorsed the principle of adopting a prevention and intervention strategy akin to those adopted in response to the use of tobacco and alcohol.

Cross-cutting Response

Scrutiny members acknowledged that their initial discussion was necessarily limited to an introduction to several issues of concern. However, the Board highlighted the complex implications for different Council services, partnerships and Executive Board portfolio holders. To ensure an integrated response scrutiny members recommend that the Executive Board takes this agenda forward on a cross-cutting basis as it considers ways in which to strengthen the local approach to reducing gambling harm.

Due to the limited influence the local authority has on many significant levers of change, the Board further recommends lobbying for national reform, particularly in regard to regulatory structures. The Board notes that a joined up approach from Government departments and agencies and the Gambling Commission (as regulator) will also be required in this regard.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

Online gambling

Scrutiny members examined the speed of change and growth in online gambling, and the failure of regulatory structures to adapt to those changes.

Specific concerns were raised about mechanisms such as 'loot boxes' in video games. The Board agreed that there is a need to identify these as gambling and to acknowledge the specific risk they present to children. As part of national lobbying, it is suggested consideration is also given to minimum age restrictions for video games which contain gambling of this kind.

Scratch cards

The Board considered the challenge for individuals affected by gambling harm of the ease of access and visibility of scratch cards in retail settings such as supermarkets.

Members welcomed ongoing local engagement with retailers on this issue but concluded that national consideration should be given to introducing restrictions on how products are displayed.

Advertising

Concern was raised about exposure to advertising by gambling firms. The Scrutiny Board recommends lobbying Government to reduce the prevalence of advertising by gambling firms - including through the introduction of a ban on advertising by gambling firms on sports kits and at sports venues.

It is recommended that the Executive Board explores further ways in which advertising by gambling firms can be restricted in Leeds communities.

Licensing

An outline was provided as to the responsibilities of the Gambling Commission, which includes the licensing of operators, and the role of the local authority in relation to the licensing and inspection of gambling premises.

Members were supportive of the recent update to the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy.

Officers advised the Scrutiny Board that the number of licence applications received by the licensing authority is very low and it was agreed that the proliferation of ways in which to gamble online is a much larger, and growing, concern.

However, Board members expressed concern about the advice within the Gambling Act 2005 that local authorities should "aim to permit" licences and suggests that the Executive Board considers advocating that ministerial consideration is given to the inclusion of an additional licensing objective within the act to specifically refer to preventing gambling from being detrimental to public health.

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