

Update on Gambling issues

Summary

This paper updates members on the licensing of betting shops, and provides information on the impact of problem gambling for public and third sector agencies.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report, and provide a steer regarding any issues of interest.

Action

Officers to take forward any recommended actions.

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Update on gambling issues

Background

1. The Board discussed the issue of the clustering of betting shops at its meeting of November 2008, following a letter from the Chair to the Minister responsible for Licensing. This paper updates members on recent developments in this area.
2. On 3 February the Chair represented the LGA at a seminar organised by the Responsibility in Gambling Trust. This paper also summarises information presented at this seminar that members may find useful.

Licensing of betting shops

3. LGA and LACORS officers met with DCMS and CLG officials on 26 March to discuss progress in tackling the clustering of betting shops in some local authorities. It was agreed that the evidence pointed to this as a localised problem. Overall numbers of betting shops are falling and DCMS believe this will quicken as the post-Gambling Act growth in premises tails off and the market corrects its self.
4. The meeting explored relevant planning issues with CLG officials, including the possibility of designating betting shops as a single usage (sui generis) class. They are at present designated as A2 class, along with banks and other financial and professional services. In order to consider such a change, CLG would need to be able to prove:
 - That the land usage of a betting shop was substantially different from other premises in A2 class;
 - That there was a nationwide need for the change to take place
5. It was agreed that, at present, neither criteria could be met. CLG added that they regularly field requests of this nature for premises (such as strip clubs) that some people may wish to control the number of, but that this was not a criteria they were able to take into consideration. CLG felt that the correct use of planning policy statements was the appropriate means of guarding against the excessive proliferation of gambling shops in an area.
6. DCMS have undertaken to meet with local authorities to explore the nature of their local planning guidance and any other relevant policy issues. Officers will further update members when these meetings have taken place.

Gambling impacts: public and third sector agencies

7. The Responsibility in Gambling Trust and Lancaster University jointly hosted an Economic, Social and Research Council (ESRC) sponsored seminar on 3

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February 2009, for Local Authorities and other key stakeholders. As part of the seminar, Professor May-Chahal, from the Department of Applied Social Science at Lancaster University, gave a presentation entitled “Gambling impacts: public and third sector agencies”.

8. The presentation examined the impacts of gambling for Local Authorities, and considered the wide range of economic, social, crime and work related impacts that had been identified as resulting from gambling. For example, certain economic benefits from gambling included benefits to national and local government through taxation, but this is counterweighted by more negative impacts such as problem gambling and increases in criminal activity and social harm.
9. Professor May-Chahal also considered some of the reasons that problem gambling might develop. These reasons included poverty, leading individuals to pursue gambling as a means of living a more affluent lifestyle; gambling as an alternative to social care; gambling as being inclusive to the vulnerable; and debt.
10. To address these negative impacts, Professor May-Chahal emphasised the importance of a nationwide strategy to work hand-in-hand with action taken at the local level. At a national level, it was important that both the government and the gaming industry acted responsibly, as well as promoting risk awareness campaigns and ensuring that information and advice for problem gamblers was made available. At a local level, Local Authorities must raise awareness of the negative impacts of gambling in schools, primary care, social services and the voluntary / third sector. It is vital that Local Authorities work with partners in ensuring joined-up pathways for early identification, harm minimisation and response, and in enlisting local statutory and voluntary agency support.

Financial Implications

11. No financial implications are specific to this report.

Implications for Wales

12. The Gambling Act 2005 applies to Wales, and issues of specific concern will be pursued with colleagues in the WLGA.

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