

06 June 2016

Westminster / Manchester / Geofutures gambling research project - overview and outcomes

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

Mark Thurstain-Goodwin of Geofutures will be attending the Board meeting to give an overview of the recent Westminster-Manchester-Geofutures research project into area vulnerability to gambling related harm.

Recommendation

That the Board consider the potential benefits of the tools developed by Geofutures for Westminster and Manchester, and how these might be applied more widely.

Action

Officers to progress as directed.

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Background

1. In summer 2014, the LGA facilitated discussions between councillors and betting shop businesses as part of a six month 'Betting Commission.'
2. The first meeting of the Commission acknowledged the general lack of reliable data relating to issues and concerns linked to betting shops. Westminster Council advised that they had developed an outline of a research project intended to address this.
3. Following the conclusion of the Betting Commission, the LGA provided a grant of £30,000 to Westminster to enable them to commission the project as a joint partner with Manchester City Council.

Issues

4. The overall objective of the project was to develop an approach that helped to understand local area vulnerability to gambling related harm. The project was led by Geofutures, a firm specialising in spatial data analysis and mapping.
5. The project ran in two stages. Recognising the lack of clear understanding about what harm from gambling actually is and who might be affected by it, the first stage focused on developing a better understanding of who is at risk; the second focused on how this information could be mapped and used by the councils to help understand the risks in their areas.
6. The first stage of the project was led by Heather Wardle, a gambling research specialist who sat on the LGA Betting Commission. This stage reviewed existing literature and data on gambling related harm.
7. This identified a number of groups for whom there was evidence to show that they were more vulnerable to experiencing harm from gambling than the general population. These are: children, adolescents and young adults (including students); people with mental health issues, including those experiencing substance abuse issues; individuals from certain minority ethnic groups; the unemployed; homeless people; those with low intellectual functioning; problem gamblers seeking treatment, those with financially constrained circumstances and those living in deprived areas.
8. The next stage of the project involved identifying datasets that could be used to map out these at risk groups in terms of local areas. National data from the 2011 census was combined with local level data – such as health information and the location of relevant services (for example, for problem gamblers, the homeless or people dealing with substance abuse, or educational establishments) – to identify 'hotspot' areas where there may be greater numbers of people who are potentially more vulnerable to harm from gambling.

9. The final report from the project is attached as **Appendix A**, and shows the maps that were produced for each council (page 58 onwards). These enable the two councils to identify areas with the greatest vulnerability to gambling related harm, based on the aggregation of individual risk factors.
10. In particular, the tools and underpinning research will enable Westminster and Manchester to provide a robust basis for new social responsibility requirements introduced by the Gambling Commission. Since April 2016, gambling operators have been required to prepare local area risk assessments setting out how their premises will manage local risks to the licensing objectives. Councils are therefore being encouraged to produce local area profiles providing more detail about their areas, including what the local risks may be and what they expect of operators in those places.
11. On the basis of the research, the councils also now have clear grounds for assessing the risk of harm to vulnerable persons from individual gambling premises, which would allow them to identify any appropriate conditions and - if the data can be shown to justify it - potentially even introduce a higher threshold for the opening of a new premise in certain areas.

Next steps

12. The project team hosted open meetings as the project was launched, at the conclusion of the literature review, and at the conclusion of the project. Alongside interest among the gambling industry, a number of councils attended these sessions and expressed interest in the tool.
13. The LGA has publicised the outcomes from the project in our bulletin and in First magazine. We are also intending to hold a gambling focused conference in Autumn 2017, which will include a focus on local area profiles and the Geofutures tool.
14. We are also considering the options for making the tool available to councils more widely. We have held initial discussions with Geofutures about the scope for incorporating a basic level of the tool (based on national datasets) to all council subscribers to our existing LG Inform tool. This would require two pieces of work, focusing firstly on the data and secondly on linking the Geofutures model to LG Inform.
15. The Gambling Commission are also interested in making national data models available on their websites, and we have discussed with them the scope for joining up on the data focused work required. However, the indicative costs quoted for this are extremely high (£120,000-£180,000 across Britain) and at the current time it does not appear feasible to do so.
16. Officers will continue to explore the potential options for supporting a wider roll out of the tool.

Implications for Wales

17. Gambling licensing is a reserved matter. The Gambling Commission's interest in the wider use of this tool extends across the whole of Britain.



**Safer & Stronger
Communities Board**

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Financial Implications

18. None.