

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**20 JUNE 2013**

### **UPDATE ON DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GAMBLING COMMISSION**

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#### **Summary**

This report provides an update on discussions with the Gambling Commission about Fixed Odds Betting Terminals and problem gambling.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1. Decisions about individual licensing applications are determined by the Licensing and Safety Committee but strategic direction on licensable activity including betting and gaming is a matter for Cabinet.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Members were notified that the Council had met with the Gambling Commission on **31 January 2013** to discuss Fixed Odds Betting Terminals and concerns about the link with problem gambling.
- 2.2 That meeting was chaired by Councillor O'Brien (the previous Portfolio Holder) and attended by Councillors Maple, Carr and Juby. Mr Burkitt of the Gambling Commission explained the statutory role of his organisation in licensing individual betting and gaming operators and the linked role of the Council in licensing betting and gaming premises. Members established the limited ability the Council had to use any of its statutory powers to tackle the issues that concerned Members. On a more positive note the possibility of entering into some sort of voluntary code of conduct with betting and gaming operators in Medway was discussed.
- 2.3 Following the meeting invites were sent on behalf of Councillor O'Brien to the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) and to the various betting and gaming operators in Medway to attend a meeting to discuss a voluntary code of conduct.
- 2.4 That meeting took place on **8 May 2013** at Gun Wharf again chaired by Councillor O'Brien with attendance from Councillors Maple and Juby and officer support. There were 15 representatives of the Medway Gaming and Betting Industry and the ABB.

- 2.5 A constructive discussion took place after a site visit to a local betting shop. There was agreement that both the trade and the Council had a responsibility to tackle problem gambling. There was agreement that the mechanism for capturing this shared agenda could be some form of written partnership agreement under the name the Medway Responsible Gambling Partnership (MRGP).
- 2.6 Two versions of an agreement were circulated at the meeting. One version drafted by the Council and linking to the responsibilities the trade already have to watch out for problem gamblers and to take appropriate action. This version sought to involve the Safer Medway Partnership as a means to share information quickly about potential problem gamblers. The other was drafted by the ABB who wished to focus on the positive impact that betting and gaming has in Medway in terms of jobs created and council tax contributions.
- 2.7 William Hill agreed to host the first meeting of the MRGP with a date to be fixed. In the meantime progress was to be made towards a single composite written agreement. With the temporary hiatus regarding Portfolio Holder responsibility for licensing matters, there has been a slight delay of about a month in progressing matters. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the MRGP can take place in July to agree a composite partnership agreement and to agree steps to implement the agreement.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 The two versions of a voluntary code/partnership arrangement provide a number of options to tackle problem gambling and will be the subject of further discussion.
- 3.2 The Gambling Commission remain interested in the on-going discussions and have offered to support the Council in exploring options.

### **4. Advice and analysis**

- 4.1 Officers believe that a partnership agreement with the local betting and gaming trade is possible. This will enable the Council to take a community leadership role in ensuring that the trade appropriately provides support and assistance to the small percentage of problem gamblers whilst accepting the positive aspects of betting and gaming in the community.

### **5. Risk management**

- 5.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>
The trade will not engage in seeking to find a shared approach to tackling problem gambling	The Council has limited legal powers to tackle problem gambling and cannot force the betting and gaming trade to do more than is required by law.	Maintain a dialogue with the trade through the MRGP and work towards a shared partnership solution agreement to supplement the legal requirements

## **6. Consultation**

6.1 Members have led on this work as highlighted above. The partnership approach proposed will involve on-going consultation with the trade and may involve consultation with problem gamblers themselves to sense check the initiatives' success.

## **7. Financial and legal implications**

7.1 There are no direct financial implications for Medway Council concerning this matter at present.

7.2 There are no direct legal implications concerning this matter at present.

## **8. Recommendations**

8.1 Members are recommended to note the progress to date and agree to receive an update in six months.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Background papers**

None