

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 DECEMBER 2015

UPDATE ON RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to update the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the voluntary partnership relating to the promotion of responsible gambling in Medway through the Medway Responsible Gambling Partnership.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Medway Council's Statement of Gambling Policy was approved by the Council on 24 January 2013, published on the website on 4 February 2013 and came into effect on 4 March 2014. This document outlines the way the Council, as the licensing authority, implements this legislation.

2. Background

- 2.1 During a meeting of the Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 6 December 2012, discussions took place relating to the increase in the number of gambling establishments and bookmakers in High Streets, especially the proliferation of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals. The Committee agreed that the Chairman and Spokespersons, together with relevant officers, should seek a meeting with the Gambling Commission to discuss an approach to the gambling industry about this. The Committee also suggested research into whether local initiatives to address these issues had been introduced elsewhere and could be applied in Medway. (Minute 622/2012 refers)
- 2.2 There followed a series of meetings with the Gambling Commission and with the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) and gambling and gaming operators in Medway hosted by the relevant Portfolio Holder with support from cross party Spokespersons.
- 2.3 During these meetings all parties agreed that a robust framework for gambling regulation exists, but it was recognised that local partnerships can supplement levels of statutory compliance, protect gambling and gaming establishment employees, at risk gamblers and assist operators to demonstrate social responsibility and enable them to aim to reduce harm in

the Medway community. Discussions took place about how a local voluntary partnership in Medway might operate and what initiatives it might seek to implement.

- 2.4 It was also highlighted that unlike other areas Medway had seen a gradual decline in the number of betting shops in recent years as illustrated in Fig.1 below.

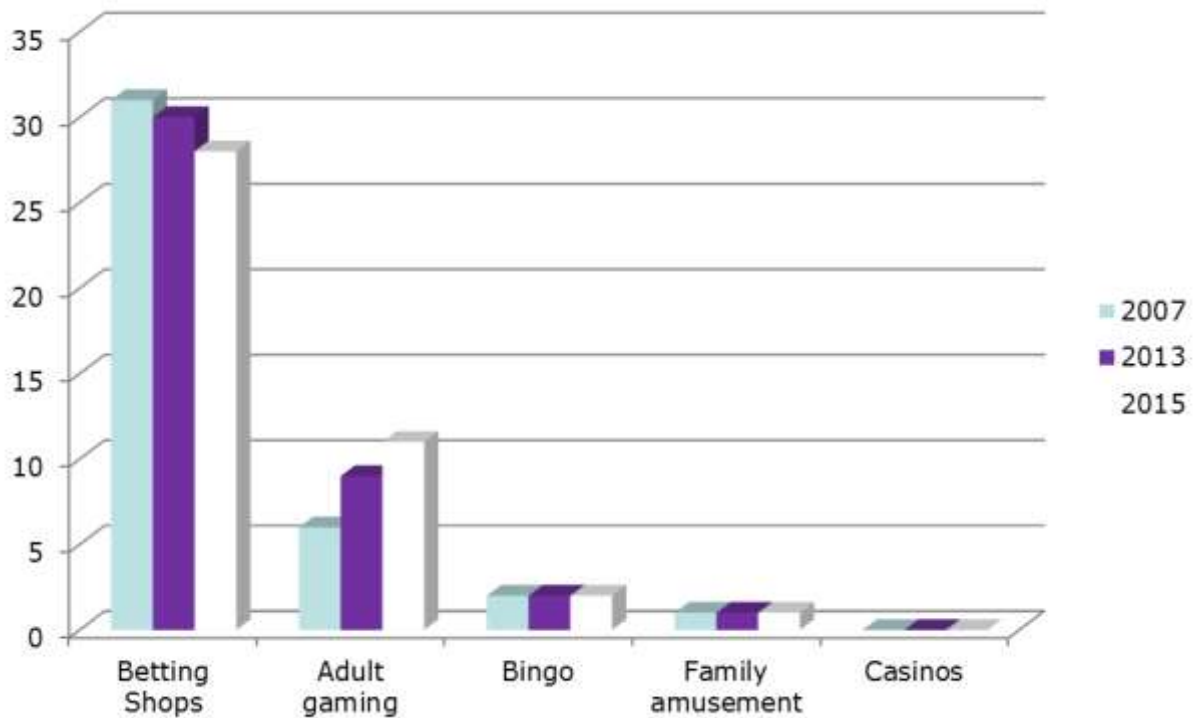


Fig.1

3. Voluntary Partnership

- 3.1 A voluntary partnership agreement between the Council, the ABB and gambling and gaming operators in Medway was signed 10 November 2014.
- 3.2 The voluntary partnership agreement set out the background and scope of the agreement, what is expected of Gambling Operators, what is expected of the Council and what the existing requirements are on Gambling Operators and the Council.
- 3.3 The Partnership set itself two key targets. Firstly to establish a self exclusion scheme. Secondly to agree a protocol for the reporting of crime and anti-social behaviour at betting shops, with the Community Safety Partnership and Kent Police. Both of these targets have been achieved.
- 3.4 A new self-exclusion scheme started in early December 2014 based in Chatham and has operated for 11 months. It is due to conclude in December 2015 but any self exclusions (which last for 12 months) will be honoured until 2016. The scheme involved a single paper form completed by customers at betting shops in Chatham with the production of a form of identification and a photograph. This form was then circulated across the operators in Chatham allowing the customer to self exclude from all operators. This scheme is the

only one of its kind in the country and has been reported in the local and national press.

- 3.5 26 individuals have used the scheme. There have been attempts to breach the scheme, which relies on staff identifying self excluders. Those breaches have to be reported to the Gambling Commission whether they involve the individual managing to gamble or being identified in store before they gamble. A local undercover reporter managed to self exclude and then re-enter some betting shops in Chatham subsequently.
- 3.6 The Voluntary Partnership which includes the Council, local Gambling Operators, the Association of British Bookmakers, the Police, the Community Safety Partnership and Safer Medway Partnership has maintained quarterly meetings to assess the progress of the self-exclusion pilot scheme. A slightly different self-exclusion pilot scheme involving a telephone number for customers to use has been launched in Glasgow. Learning from the Chatham scheme has been used to design that other pilot and will also feature in the national self-exclusion scheme due to launch in April 2016.
- 3.7 The Council have been offered the opportunity to become an early adopter of the national scheme. This will involve a website pointing customers to a telephone helpline. The helpline will be managed by trained staff that will assist those seeking to self exclude. Learning from the Chatham pilot scheme includes the importance of this early human interaction. Also it is important to choose betting shops near a customer's home, work and socialising areas rather than a blanket ban of all shops.
- 3.8 The Medway Responsible Gambling Partnership is due to meet in December to formally review the self-exclusion scheme and consider what work it will focus on for the coming year.

4. National picture

- 4.1 A letter was sent to the Minister for Culture, Media & Sport from the Committee after its meeting on 8 October 2015 asking for a review of the minimum stake of £100 for Fixed Odds Betting Machines to be lowered. It was also suggested that a £50 limit after which customers have to seek authorisation to bet further should also be lowered. No reply has yet been received.
- 4.2 A report in the Sunday Times on 8 November 2015 suggested that a government review of Fixed Odds Betting Machines had been blocked. This followed responses given by the Minister in Parliament on 27 October 2015. An extract of this is set out below:

“Gaming Machines

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to paragraph 7 of his Department's Triennial Review of gaming machine stake and prize limits, published in October 2013, whether it is his policy that there is a serious case to answer in relation to the potential harm caused by category B2 gaming machines.

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Answered by: [Tracey Crouch](#)

Answered on: 27 October 2015

Following the last review, new measures were introduced in April 2015 to help players of fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) stay in control. Players of FOBTs who want to stake more than £50 in one play are now required to interact with staff over the counter or register a customer account card. My department are in the process of conducting an evaluation of these measures and I will publish the results in due course.”

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 There are no specific risks linked to the receipt of this report by the Committee.

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report
- 6.2 The Council has produced its Statements of Policy as required by the Gambling Act 2005 and has signed the voluntary partnership agreement to encourage responsible gambling in Medway and provide a mechanism for those seeking help.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Committee notes work undertaken in Medway at the request of the Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee that culminated in the signing of a voluntary partnership agreement between the members of the Medway Responsible Gambling Partnership.
- 7.2 That the Committee notes the outcomes of a multi operator self-exclusion pilot scheme in Medway.
- 7.3 That the Committee requests further updates are provided to it on the work of the Medway Responsible Gambling Partnership and the self-exclusion scheme.

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Background papers

None