

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A
Date:	10 MARCH 2022
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW: GAMBLING HARMS
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to introduce the Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harms topic to Scrutiny Panel A. Gambling Harms was added to the scrutiny work programme at the December 2021 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This report provides the Panel with background information regarding gambling and gambling-related harms and sets out some initial considerations for the review scope.

Recommendation(s)

Members of Scrutiny Panel A are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report.
- b. Undertake a review scoping exercise to determine the objectives, methodology, and potential outcomes of the Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harms.
- c. Identify next steps to be taken to progress the Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harms.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harms was added to the scrutiny work programme by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2021.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the review process.

Detailed Information

INTRODUCTION

December 2021 Council Meeting

At the December 2021 meeting of Council, Members approved a revised Statement of Gambling Policy effective from 31 January 2022. During the debate on this item, various Members voiced growing concerns on the serious impacts of gambling on local communities and individuals, with a desire for the Council to identify what it can do to lessen these issues.

Following this debate at Council, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee voted to add gambling harms as a topic to the scrutiny work programme so that the issues highlighted during the debate could be explored further, with comments and recommendations to be put to Cabinet directly.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

LGA Councillor Handbook: Gambling Regulation

In July 2021, the LGA published a councillor handbook designed to assist councillors in understanding gambling regulations and the role local authorities have in managing those regulations.

Within the handbook there is a section on “Protecting Vulnerable People”. This section states that protecting children and vulnerable people from being harmed or exploited by gambling is one of the three licensing objectives. Ensuring that this objective is upheld is one of the core responsibilities licensing authorities must meet.

The full LGA handbook on gambling regulation can be accessed through the following link:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/gambling-regulation-councillor-handbook-england-and-wales-0>.

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is working on a project with the Gambling Commission to raise awareness and increase the involvement of elected members in overview and scrutiny roles in tackling gambling related harms. As part of the project, the CfGS have released a document detailing how local authorities are using scrutiny to tackle gambling harms.

As set out in the introduction to *Local Authorities Using Scrutiny to Tackle Gambling Harms*:

“The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered the gambling landscape by shifting activity online due to restrictions on people’s movements, the cancellation of major sporting events, and the closure of commercial venues. The most recent Gambling Commission statistics demonstrates a 7.7% decrease in licensed betting premises between March and November 2020, and this is a continuing trend.

Many experts are now examining the impact of the pandemic upon gambling behaviours, alongside increased availability and accessibility of gambling products, the use of multiple products, the time spent gambling, and the alarming, elevated risk of harms.

Gambling harms are an issue for every local authority in the UK, both from the perspective of the authority's wellbeing and community leadership role, and their regulatory responsibilities. The growing issue of gambling harms can also be considered within the wider commitment to reducing health inequalities and an equitable post-covid recovery.

Whilst many councils have discussed gambling harm within licensing committees, in the context of reviewed and updating the gambling policy statement, through our research we have found that tackling gambling harms is underexplored in local authorities. As with other public health issues, arguably there should be consideration of gambling harms at the highest level to ensure appropriate political and strategic priority.”¹

The CfGS publication goes on to provide recent examples of councils tackling gambling harms through scrutiny committees – using the function to understand, evaluate, and improve efforts that prevent and treat gambling harms in the community.

Common themes have been identified:

- Mapping areas of risk and vulnerable populations
- Bringing together local partners
- Involving stakeholders and victims
- Seeking to understand individual, social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors that influence a person's experience of gambling harm
- Understanding gambling harms as a public health issue and advocating for a whole system approach to address this
- Recommending a coordinated action plan to prevent and reduce gambling harms
- Lobbying government through correspondence with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sports to take action on gambling harms

Case Study Examples

Devon County Council

Councillors in Devon expressed concern about the impacts of gambling in their communities and were keen to explore the wider societal and economic effects. Scrutiny asked for Public Health to report on the issue – the report outlined that Devon's seasonal tourism; high house prices and low wages has caused pockets of deprivation. This deprivation puts communities at risk to gambling related harms, the impacts of which are highly likely to influence spend on services for vulnerable people.

In 2018, Devon County Council undertook a scrutiny spotlight review of gambling-related harms, the scope of this spotlight review was:

- To understand the underlying causes of problem gambling and the challenges associated with problem gambling
- To explore the ways in which the Council and partners could work together to prevent people who are at risk of problem gambling reaching crisis point
- To identify the ways in which the Council and partners could work together to support people who have gambling addictions

¹ Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, *Local authorities using scrutiny to tackle gambling harms*, June 2021.

The review carried out by Devon County Council reflected the importance of the issue from a public health and partnership perspective, as well as the importance of Councillors having a community leadership role.

Key questions of the review focused on prevention, understanding when gambling becomes a problem, and identifying support available when someone is struggling with problem gambling. Bringing together different stakeholders and partners to collectively problem solve, the parties involved included other local authorities, the Police, gambling charities, and a company supplying gambling equipment.

The review was interested in whether there were specific characteristics and risk factors that led people to become problem gamblers. One concern was the link between gambling and suicide. The review was also concerned about the increasing trajectory of remote gambling.

The findings of the review were particularly focused around the need for reliable and accurate data. Several of the partners involved in the review committed to working together to better understand the scale of the problem as well as to support services that exist to help people with gambling addiction.

Bradford Metropolitan District Council

In 2019, Bradford's Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee members received a report that detailed how gambling businesses were mainly situated in some of the most deprived areas of the Bradford District.

Bradford has high prevalence of population groups particularly vulnerable to gambling related harm. Evidence indicates that particular groups are more vulnerable to gambling related harm than others – young people are one of these groups, and Bradford has the highest percentage of under 18s for a city authority in the country. People living in areas of greater deprivation is another vulnerable group, Bradford is ranked the 11th most income deprived local authority in England.

Bradford's Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider the prevalence of gambling and gambling related harm within the district and the development of the Council's approach to problem gambling.

Over several meetings, many different perspectives were sought to inform the committee. A representative from an organisation which campaigns to highlight the dangers of problem gambling – "Gambling with Lives" was present at the meeting to talk about the work of the organisation and how he had lost his own son through problem gambling. The committee also invited a representative of the gambling operator William Hill and a recovering gambling addict.

Members highlighted that a broader debate needed to be had with the industry on the issue of problem gambling. Following these scrutiny meetings, councillors were in agreement that more effective controls needed to be in place to tackle the issue of problem gambling in Bradford.

The full *Local Authorities Using Scrutiny to Tackle Gambling Harms* publication, with more case study examples, can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Scrutiny-and-gambling-harms-case-studies.pdf>.

GAMBLING RELATED HARMS

The Government published a research and analysis paper in September 2021 titled *Gambling-related Harms Evidence Review* that sets out some of the foremost gambling related issues in the UK, as well as the national picture on gambling in recent years.²

In the 2005 Gambling Act, gambling is defined as gaming, betting, and participating in a lottery.

As set out in the research paper, in recent years, concern about the harms associated with gambling has been increasing in the UK and in March 2018, Public Health England confirmed priorities to 'inform and support action on gambling-related harm as part of the follow up to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport-led review of gaming machines and social responsibility'.

Stated in the introduction to the research paper:

*"The UK has one of the biggest gambling markets in the world, generating a profit of £14.2 billion in 2020. Previous research has shown that harms associated with gambling are wide-ranging. These include not only harms to the individual gambler but their families, close associates, and wider society. There have been growing calls by the public health community, people with lived experience, and parliamentarians that a population-level approach is needed to tackle this public health issue. However, there was a need to fully understand the extent to which gambling is a public health issue, for whom it is a problem, and the extent of the possible harms."*³

The evidence reviews and analysis examined the following questions:

1. What is the prevalence of gambling and gambling-related harm in England by socio-demographic characteristics, geographical distribution, and year?
2. What are the determinants (risk factors) of gambling and harmful gambling?
3. What are the harms to individuals, families, communities, and wider societal harms associated with harmful gambling?
4. What is the social and economic burden of gambling-related harms?
5. To what extent has coronavirus affected gambling participation and behaviour?

Gambling-related Harms Evidence Review can be read in full at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gambling-related-harms-evidence-review/gambling-related-harms-evidence-review-summary>

REVIEW SCOPING

At the commencement of a review, it is good practice for Members to consider the review scope. Please see below some key questions and suggestions:

- What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

² *Gambling-related Harms Evidence Review*, Public Health England, September 2021.

³ *Gambling*, Public Health England, September 2021.

- *The aim of the review is to conduct an investigation into the scale and effect of gambling and gambling-related issues in Ashfield.*
- What are the key lines of enquiry?
 - *What are the types of gambling activity?*
 - *What is the Council's licensing regime?*
 - *How many licensed premises are in Ashfield?*
 - *What is Government policy regarding gambling?*
 - *What information exists regarding levels of gambling-related harm and impacts on health and wellbeing?*
 - *Are there preventative measures in place in relation to gambling-related harm?*
 - *What are the views of local operators?*
- What information is needed?
 - *Details of national guidance/legislation regarding gambling*
 - *Statistical information relating to gambling nationally and locally*
 - *Relevant reports and research papers into gambling-related issues*
 - *Actions taken by other local authorities*
- How will information be gathered?
 - *Committee meetings*
 - *Desktop research*
 - *Site visits*
 - *Focus groups*
 - *Surveys*
- How will key partners be involved in the review?
 - *Identify an appropriate method to engage key partners and stakeholders in the review process.*

NEXT STEPS

The next formal meeting of Scrutiny Panel A is not scheduled until after the Annual Council Meeting in May. Members may want to consider arranging an informal working group before the Annual Council Meeting to progress the review.

Members should also identify what information, evidence, and attendance is required at the next meeting to progress the review.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

In scoping the topic, gambling can have implications on the following priorities detailed within the Corporate Plan:

- Health and Happiness

- Economic Growth and Place
- Cleaner and Greener
- Safer and Stronger
- Innovate and Improve

Legal:

Section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005 requires the Licensing Authority to prepare and publish a Statement of Gambling Licensing Policy every 3 years. The current Statement 2022-2025 was published in December 2021.

Finance:

There are no financial implications contained within this report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None
General Fund – Capital Programme	None
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Gambling harm has been identified by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny as being a key social issue that would benefit from scrutiny consideration. Furthermore, the CFGS is also working with the Gambling Commission on a project to raise awareness and increase the involvement of elected members in overview and scrutiny roles in tackling gambling related harms. It was added to the workplan in December 2021. To not consider this topic would risk not complying with the Scrutiny Workplan and being unable to demonstrate consideration of national issues at a local level.	Scoping meeting on the agreed topic to be held on the 10 March 2022 setting out objectives, methodology and desired outcomes.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from this report.

Environmental/Sustainability

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from this report.

Equalities:

There no diversity or equality implications contained within this report.

Other Implications:

None.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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