

SCRUTINY PANEL A

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 14th July, 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Dave Shaw in the Chair;

Councillors Dale Grounds, Lauren Mitchell,
Warren Nuttall, David Walters and
Caroline Wilkinson.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Jim Blagden.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

SA.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SA.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 March 2022, be received and approved as a correct record.

SA.3 Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harm

The Scrutiny Research Officer welcomed all present to the meeting and introduced the report. He asked Members to note that following a recent Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting it had been acknowledged that the current Scrutiny Work Programme was extensive and therefore the Panel needed to be expedient with its reviews to ensure all review topics were completed within the 2022/23 municipal year.

With that in mind, Members took the opportunity to consider the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) guidance document titled '10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising gambling harm'. The publication was part of a CfGS project in partnership with the Gambling Commission to raise awareness and increase the involvement of elected members in overview and scrutiny roles tackling gambling harm as a review topic.

The draft terms of reference, as outlined in the report, were also considered and accepted as appropriate for the review.

Following a recent meeting with the Service Manager for Customer Services to ascertain if any Council staff in front facing roles have offered advice or support to residents in relation to gambling addictions, it was evident that customers were extremely reticent towards revealing any gambling addictions or difficulties they were experiencing. It was more common for issues to present themselves as debt, housing or employment problems rather than the addiction itself.

In addition, customer services staff were not specialists in these fields and were trained to be cautious about offering any detailed advice to vulnerable adults. Their role however, did include signposting the individual to charities or organisations that dealt with gambling addictions specifically.

It was acknowledged that the nearest Gamblers Anonymous organisation was in Nottingham City and that no particular initiatives were currently running within the Ashfield area. There were also currently no links to any organisations of this nature on the Council's website.

A discussion then took place and Members debated and commented upon the following:

- gambling problems manifesting themselves as housing and debt difficulties resulting in the Council becoming involved to assist local residents and their families remain secure in their homes
- the essential work being carried out by the Council's Housing Debt Management Team to support local residents experiencing financial difficulties
- the quality of Gambling Harm information contained on the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) website and the possibility of the Council signposting this site within its own pages
- acknowledgement that the Government's Gambling Act White Paper would imminently be published with Members being keen to review the content as soon as possible
- the insidious increase in TV gambling across both adult and children's programming schedules in the form of adverts and competitions with the stark realisation that charitable organisations were now also jumping of the bandwagon to raise much needed funds for their causes
- acceptance of the fact that gambling will never be eradicated but that many improvements can still be made to reduce addiction risk for vulnerable individuals
- the increasing problem of gambling addiction within younger age groups arising from the plethora of 'loot box' offers through multiple gaming platforms and TV programming
- the need for education to commence during primary school years to ensure children are fully aware of the temptations of gambling, in any form, from an early age

- the possible benefits of including short educational gambling harm videos on the Council's website alongside any supporting/signposting information.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny publication regarding '10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising gambling harm', as attached to the report, be received and noted;
- b) the proposed review terms of reference, as outlined in the report, be approved;
- c) the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to circulate a copy of the Gambling Act White Paper to Panel Members as soon as it is published.

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm

Chairman.