

Government review of gaming machines and social responsibility

The Local Government Association has raised repeated concerns about the impact of high stakes Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) and betting shop clustering in local communities. We were therefore pleased that the Government launched the review of gaming machine stakes in 2016, and support the review's wider focus on social responsibility. Councils are not anti-gambling, but it is vital that we have the right measures in place to protect local residents and communities from the impact of gambling related harm.



Key issues for the review

Fixed Odds Betting Terminals

It is extremely positive that the consultation document commits to a substantial reduction in FOBT stakes. However, Government should ensure that stakes are reduced to £2, rather than the higher proposals. The other proposals would still be significantly out of line with the maximum amounts that can be staked on other types of gaming machine – which the consultation proposes to keep at the existing levels of just £2 for other high street machines and £5 in more closely regulated casinos.

There is credible evidence that these machines may be particularly addictive, leading to significant harm to problem gamblers, and are linked to anti-social behaviour and crime in betting shops.

An **LGA member council** became aware of a local resident that lost up to £1,000 in a single lunch hour, with accumulated debts eventually totalling over £100,000. The council believe that the resident was not challenged by staff, and noted that the machines are unsupervised most of the time.

Newham Council report that for the period 2015/16 the number of police call outs linked to betting shops was equivalent to 1.2 incidents per day.

Hounslow Council are aware of 48 criminal damage incidents linked to B2 machines in betting shops in the borough between November 2015 and November 2016.

Betting shop clustering

The LGA believes that the profitability of B2 gaming machines and restriction to four machines per shop has helped to drive betting shop clustering in some areas – Newham Council has experienced a 47 per cent increase in betting shops in the borough since 2007.

In Hackney, there are six betting premises licensed on a single street.

Independent research shows that clusters are typically located in more deprived areas, where the harm from problem gambling may be exacerbated: ‘areas close to betting shops tend towards higher levels of crime events, resident deprivation, unemployment, and ethnic diversity...[and] players overall tend to live in neighbourhoods with higher levels of resident unemployment, multiple deprivation and economic inactivity.’¹

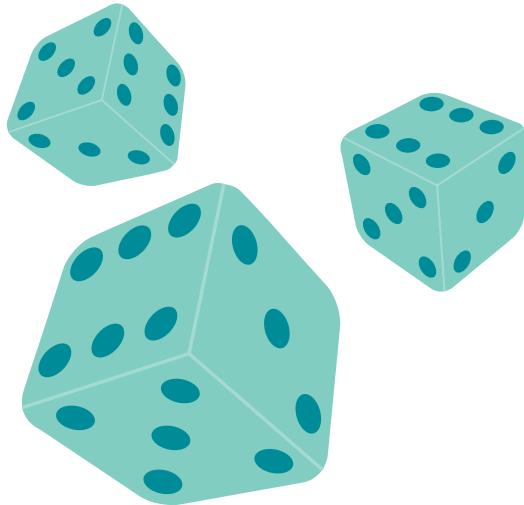
The LGA supports stronger powers for councils to limit betting shop clustering, and does not agree with the consultation’s argument that councils already have powers to do so. We will continue to call for a legal brake on the statutory aim to permit gambling in places where there are already existing clusters of premises.

Advertising

The LGA has called on Government to look seriously at measures to curb the volume of gambling advertising, and in particular advertising which is easily accessible to, and seen by children. We are concerned that the current volume of gambling advertising goes beyond what can be deemed the right balance between socially responsible growth and protecting individuals and communities – the review’s overall objective.

Research, education and treatment

The LGA supports a mandatory levy for research, education and treatment that supports individuals and families at risk of, or experiencing, gambling related harm.



Other LGA work

Alongside lobbying for changes to address the issues of high stakes FOBTs and betting shop clustering, the LGA is working with its member authorities to help strengthen local approaches to gambling regulation and supporting problem gamblers. We are currently updating our councillor handbook on gambling licensing², and working with the Gambling Commission to develop specific guidance for licensing authorities as they prepare to review their gambling licensing policies. We are also developing new guidance for councils on how they can support problem gamblers in their areas, building on recent work on this issue by Leeds City Council.³

For more information, visit
www.local.gov.uk/community-safety

or email **Ellie Greenwood** at
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¹ http://infohub.gambleaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/b2gamingmachines_finalreport_20150218.pdf

² <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-study-gambling-regulation-councillor-handbook-england-and-wales>

³ <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Problem%20Gambling%20Report.pdf>