

### **Gambling Reform APPG Session:**

#### **The Proliferation of B3 Gaming Machines and Adult Gaming Centres**

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Time:** 3:00pm - 4:30pm

**Location:** Palmer Room, One Great George Street

**Chair:** Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP

**Minutes:** Max Strangleman-Sykes, DGA Group

#### **Members Present:**

- Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP (Chair)
- Dr Beccy Cooper MP (Officer)
- Oliver Dowden MP
- Andrew Pakes MP
- Sammy Wilson MP

#### **External Guests:**

- Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
- Laura MacDonald, University of Glasgow
- Councillor Milli Patel, Brent Council
- Councillor Matt Kelcher, Brent Council
- Councillor Jumbo Chan, Brent Council
- Theo Bertram, Social Market Foundation
- Ron Davies, The Guardian
- Jackie Olden, Enough Gambling
- Danny Cheetham, Enough Gambling

Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP: Welcomed all the attendees, and introduced the speakers present at the session. He asked Laura to open the session with her introductory remarks and research.

Laura MacDonald: Outlined key findings from her research looking into gambling outlet densities, economic impact and deprivation by constituency in Great Britain. Outlining her work, data sets and methodology, she went onto state that the key conclusion from her research showed that B3 machines are most concentrated in coastal areas, major cities, and – concerningly – the most deprived areas of the country. In particular, the highest B3 machine density was found in parts of England's Northeast and Midlands, Great Yarmouth, Boston & Skegness, urban centers such as Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool, as well as scattered pockets of London, including Brent.

Andy Burnham: Thanked the APPG for their close attention to this matter, and described how gambling is a significant issue for any MP in the North West of England. He highlighted how his views on gambling had changed since he left Westminster in 2017, and how local, grassroots engagement in Manchester over the cost-of-living crisis had informed his change of perspective. He outlined his Office's work launching the Chapter One pilot to recognise and address gambling harms and strengthened pathways to the NHS Northern Gambling Service for local residents.

He thanked Jackie Olden for her eye-opening work, which has encouraged him look at the issue more closely. He outlined that if all current applications are passed, 80 Adult Gaming Centres (AGC) will be open in the region and that local authorities feel powerless to stop them. Burnham explained that in Longsight – an area of significant deprivation – there was huge opposition to an AGC application. Despite 42,000 people signing a petition against the application and involvement from the local MP, the application was still approved.

Burnham went onto ask that the APPG consider recommending the reclassification of AGC's in law. AGC's are currently considered leisure venues – which does not reflect the harm that are

caused by them. Local authorities should have far more power to license according to harm inflicted within communities, restrict opening hours, and imposing more social responsibility conditions. The English Devolution Bill marks an opportunity to empower councils to do so.

Jumbo Chan: Councillor Chan outlined how hundreds of local residents have written to Brent Council regarding the overconcentration of gambling premises in local high streets. All major parties are against the proliferation of AGC's. Chan said that Brent Council had exhausted ways to block AGC's locally and then passed onto his colleagues to detail the Council's 6 Point Plan further.

Milli Patel: Councillor Patel outlined how Brent Council have led a campaign that has called on Government to reform the statutory 'Aim to Permit' policy in the 2005 Gambling Act. The letter has since been signed by over 40 local councils, two mayors – including Andy Burnham – representing a combined population of over 12 million people across the UK. Harlesden has 7 gambling premises and faces a variety of challenges related to deprivation, poverty and health inequalities. B3 machines cause local residents to lose significant sums of money in a short space of time. 6.2% of Brent residents are gamblers, where the national average is 2.9%. There are 80 gambling premises across Brent – it is easier to get to a gambling establishment than it is to get to a GP or a major shopping centre. Patel outlined that the Council are not anti-gambling but want local authorities to have the power to say "no more" to premises where there is significant backlash locally against AGC applications.

Matt Kelcher: Councillor Kelcher stated that the 'Aim to Permit' is the central issue that Brent faces – whereby councillors currently have a statutory duty as licensing authorities to allow gambling premises to open wherever they can. Kelcher's experience has taught him that the gambling industry has a huge amount of money and resources behind them when it comes to licensing committees. Describing the classifications of gambling premise types, Kelcher said that Councils are hamstrung in what they can do due to legislation. Councils can stop a fish and chip shop opening next to a school because there is a framework against junk food but cannot stop an AGC opening up next to a homeless shelter, or addiction centre at present.

Theo Bertram: Mr Bertram discussed how communities should be empowered to have a say on the density and number of AGC's locally. The Social Market Foundation are collaborating with Brent Council to look at the harms and benefits of AGC's, and their proliferation. He outlined how the introduction Cumulative Impact Assessment's (CIAs) are needed for gambling licensing.

Rob Davies: Mr Davies described how in AGC's, when players "play to extinction" they will often attack the machines. AGC's will frequently not involve the police on these occasions, as they would rather eat the costs of replacing machines than have such instances on record. Davies described the visceral anger that players leaving AGC's would have and implied this has anti-social behaviour consequences for local communities. Reliable studies cite that for every one problem gambler, six other people are affected. He outlined that another often-overlooked aspect of this issue is that when hundreds of local residents sign petitions opposing AGC's opening in their community, only to see it approved anyway, it breeds deep disillusionment and intensifies public frustration with elected officials. The majority of AGC's are 24/7, and this is often cited as necessary for nightshift workers. However, in his experience, the majority of those entering gambling premises in the middle of the night are vulnerable, often inebriated people – despite not theoretically being able to enter under these conditions.

AGC workers are not incentivised to intervene when someone is exhibiting worrying signs of problem gambling – and cannot and should not be expected to when there is a threat of violence. He outlined that one potential solution would be to introduce a sign-up mechanism for people to gamble at AGC's – which would mean that problematic play could be quickly spotted and dealt with effectively. The Gambling Commission are a step behind and simply do not have the manpower or capability to do its job effectively.

Jackie Olden: Ms Olden said that her interest in this area started when her Mother – who was suffering from cancer at the time – gambled away over £2,000 across a 16-hour sitting in an AGC venue. Alarmingly, the premise's staff made no effort to intervene to prevent any potential harm, and of the consumer safety requirements that AGCs are mandated to undertake – none occurred.

Following a Gambling Commission investigation, Merkur Stockport were fined £95,000. It was at this time, Danny Cheetham (Lived Experience), approached her as he had experienced similar consumer safety failings at the same Stockport venue.

Danny Cheetham: Summarised that he had previously had an online gambling addiction, but owed to self-exclusion schemes was able to stop gambling online. However, he relapsed at an Adult Gaming Centre – the venue same as Jackie Olden's Mother. Mr Cheetham showed a video which briefly outlined his experience losing thousands of pounds and explained the clear lack of safeguards that land-based gambling enforce.

***At this stage, the discussion was opened to the floor***

Dr Beccy Cooper MP: Asked panellists how a new gambling act could legislate against some of the issues mentioned.

Andy Burnham: Mr Burnham responded by saying that gambling needs to be viewed through a public health lens, limiting harm and maximising local authorities' capacity to do this. The high street needs to be saved in a very different way than by increasing gambling premises – this industry argument should never be accepted.

Milli Patel, Jumbo Chan & Matt Kelcher: Each stressed how public health much to have an emboldened role when considering AGC applications, in addition to much-needed reform of the 'Aim to Permit' policy. Until the 'Aim to Permit' is reformed, amendments would simply be tinkering.

Rob Davies: Mr Davies expressed his scepticism over the possibility of a new Gambling Act – making reference to the well-documented links between the Labour Party and the gambling industry.

Jackie Olden and Danny Cheetham: Both said there were immediate fixes that could make the situation better – particularly around tracking player activity via membership schemes or by debit cards being used rather than cash. They outlined that it is hard to prove that you were in the gambling premise as players do not have a right to the CCTV available. Moving away from cash and allowing cashless payments would enable far more comprehensive consumer protections to be established.

***SESSION CONCLUDES***