

UK Labour Party Officially Backs Live Sports Advertising Ban, Mandatory Gambling Levy

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The Labour Party would ban all gambling advertising during live sports and introduce a mandatory 1 percent levy if it wins the next election, according to new manifesto promises announced on Thursday.

The UK opposition Labour Party has published a report detailing the outcome of its months-long inquiry into gambling in the UK, including a dramatic set of new manifesto commitments.

Among them is what the party calls a "whistle to whistle" ban on gambling advertising during live sport, and for an as yet unspecified amount of time before and after a game.

UK licensees will also be forced to contribute 1 percent of gross gambling revenue to problem gambling charities, a ten times increase on the current voluntary 0.1 percent recommended by GambleAware.

Labour would also create new rules allowing problem gamblers to demand that their banks block all attempted gambling transactions and create an absolute ban on the use of credit cards for gambling.

The project is led by deputy leader Tom Watson and Jon Ashworth, MP for Leicester South. According to a statement from the party, the pair have spent the the last year consulting with charities and industry bodies.

"Current gambling regulation is not up to the job of protecting addicts and those at risk of addiction," said Watson.

"Gambling companies have to take more responsibility for harm caused by their products and contribute more to research and treatment."

"We must also face up to the negative effect the explosion in gambling advertising has had and act accordingly. It's what any responsible government looking to address gambling addiction must do," he said.

The manifesto promises were greeted coolly by one industry veteran.

Consultant David Clifton called the plan to ban gambling ads during live sport "a complete overreaction to public concern".

The heads of a number of leading gambling companies have suggested that they would back tighter restrictions on betting ads during sport, but all have stopped short of supporting an all-out ban.

Under Labour's plan "sports intrinsically linked to gambling such as horse racing" would be exempt from the prohibition.

"As matters stand it would be an unwarranted intrusion into the freedom of operators to market their services in a responsible way," said Clifton.

Labour's report also calls for Premier League clubs to end all sponsorship deals with gambling companies and threatens to "take legislative action" to force their hands if England's top football clubs are unwilling.

Clifton also described Watson and Ashworth's plan to force banks to offer a form of self-exclusion as "a blatant attempt to catch the popular vote in a way that should be an action of last resort".

Challenger banks Monzo and Starling have already launched their own version of a service that will block attempted gambling transactions based on merchant codes.

However, Clifton suggested that before forcing all banks to introduce similar schemes, "first let's give GAMSTOP a chance".

Linking up with the controversially delayed multi-operator online self-exclusion scheme GAMSTOP will become mandatory once it is completed. Although the service has been soft launched, it is not expected to be fully up and running until early 2019, more than a year after its planned completion date.

Labour's report also repeats Watson's previous calls for a new Gambling Act, replacing existing legislation with a document that is "fit for the digital age with a stronger emphasis on harm prevention".

However, many of the party's key policy goals are achievable without changes to legislation. The Gambling Act's definition of advertising is deliberately "very broad" and according to the text of the legislation covers "anything [done] to encourage one or more persons to take advantage of facilities for gambling".

This wording, combined with theoretical changes to the BCAP advertising code and the Gambling Commission's [incoming beefed-up enforcement powers](#), would make the live sports advertising ban achievable without an act of parliament, said Clifton.

A forced increase in the amount that companies must pay towards gambling charities is also likely to be met with resistance.

Speaking at Wednesday's Betting on Sports conference in London, one executive said that although problem gambling is an issue that may need urgent attention, the best approach is to have the industry work with government, academia and clinicians.

"I'm loathe to have someone say, 'let's throw money at the problem'," said Keith O'Loughlin, senior vice president for sportsbook and platforms at SG Digital. "Let's have a strategy."

Labour would also ban anyone under the age of 18 from taking part in free-to-play online gambling games.

Other planned measures detailed in the report include greater coordination between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The existing government, via DCMS minister Tracey Crouch, has already [made moves](#) to encourage more public health spend on problem gambling treatment.

Additional reporting by David Altaner.

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