

GambleAware speech:

Introduction

- I want to say thank you to Marc and Kate for inviting me to speak to you.
- I am Neil McArthur and I am proud to be the chief executive of the Gambling Commission.
- I am here today to speak about the need for all of us to work together to reduce gambling related harms.

Context

- I joined the Commission in 2006 and a lot has changed in that time:
 - Technology has changed
 - Consumer behaviour has changed, and
 - Public attitudes towards gambling have changed - to name just three.
- But some of the challenges have remained constant:
 - First and foremost: how to balance customer choice and enjoyment against the risks gambling can create for some consumers and wider society?
 - Second, how to regulate a product or activity that isn't like other things
 - One that it is a source of fun for most
 - And one that is deeply engrained in British life
 - But can become addictive and can cause serious harm for some
 - The third challenge stems from the fact that gambling is a subject to which people bring their own values, beliefs and opinions to bear and sometimes these are given as much, if not more, weight than evidence.
- The Commission's objectives - The Licensing Objectives – have also remained constant. They are the touchstone of the Commission's work.

Developing the successor to the current National Responsible Gambling Strategy

- One of the Licensing Objectives is protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling. That objective always has been and always will be integral to everything we do.
- The National Responsible Gambling Strategy is one of the principal ways in which we have pursued that objective.
- The current strategy ends next March which coincides with the end of Sir Chris Kelly's final term as chair of the RGSB.

- I'd like to pay tribute to Sir Chris. He has been a strong and consistent voice on gambling related harms and I want to thank him for the work that has been achieved during his time as Chair.
- Last month, we were delighted to announce Dr Anna van der Gaag as the new Chair. She brings a wealth of experience in health, social care and the prevention of harm and I look forward to working closely with her.
- There has undoubtedly been progress under the existing strategy:
 - Having gambling related harms recognised as a health issue has been a big step forward
 - Getting gambling businesses to take their responsibilities much more seriously has also been a step in the right direction
 - **But** we must also acknowledge that:
 - In overall terms, progress has been slower than everyone hoped
 - The 'tri-partite' arrangements agreed between the Commission, RGSB and GambleAware in 2012 look increasingly out of date and in need of review.
- That is why the Commission is leading the development of the successor to the National Responsible Gambling Strategy.
 - We think that is necessary if we are going to make faster and better progress in the years ahead.
 - We also want the new strategy to set out clearer priorities and the roles, responsibilities and the accountability for delivery.
- We want to get a diverse range of bodies to contribute to the development of the strategy and its delivery - to ensure that gambling related harms are seen as a health issue - and to build capacity to reduce harms.
- This is why we have started consulting on the new strategy this week.

Why 'gambling related harms' not 'responsible gambling'?

- I hope you have noticed that I have been talking about 'gambling harms' here – not 'responsible gambling'. That is deliberate.
 - 'Responsible gambling' tends to focus on an individual gambler's behaviour and puts the onus on the individual consumer rather than a gambling operator.
 - That is important, but:
 - It may overlook the impact of specific products on specific consumers.

- It also risks overlooking the impact on other people and on wider society.
- We use the term ‘gambling related harms’ as it goes wider than the individual and covers the adverse impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society.

What about harm minimisation?

- I want to make two points about ‘harm minimisation’:
 - The first is about research, education and treatment
 - As I said earlier, progress on the current National Responsible Gambling Strategy has been slow and the gambling industry needs to up its game by ensuring there is proper funding for Research Education and Treatment.
 - As we stated in our advice to Government on the gambling review if the industry can’t provide what is needed, there is strong case for a statutory levy.
 - Secondly, on problem gambling rates
 - Stable statistics are not, in my view, a good news story.
 - I want to see problem gambling rates reduce within a culture of innovation. By trialling and evaluating different measures to identify what works best to protect consumers.

Why is diversity important to the regulator? (A question I am asked quite often)

- At the Commission, we recognise that there is no simple guaranteed solution to the difficult challenge of balancing customer choice and enjoyment against the risks of gambling related harms.
- That is why today’s theme of ‘diversity’ is so welcome:
 - I think diversity is essential to creativity and innovation.
 - For me, diversity is about nurturing a culture that draws on the widest possible range of skills, knowledge and experience.
 - I also think greater diversity plays a vital in helping challenge assumptions about how the world works.
 - **LET ME GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE FROM A DIFFERENT FIELD:**
 - **LIFT STORY**

- In my view, diversity should help everyone to better understand, reflect and meet the needs of consumers. It should also lead to fewer assumptions and better governance, risk management and decision making.
- That is why diversity is important to the Commission. Without greater diversity – at all levels and in all parts of the industry and its stakeholders - we risk repeating the same old thinking and getting the same old results; or making assumptions about what works, when a different approach might be even better.
- This is why I think we need more diversity in the gambling industry – including:
 - Greater diversity of research into gambling related harms and prevention
 - Greater understanding of consumer behaviour, so that more people are kept safe and fewer experience any level of harm from gambling
 - Greater evidence in relation to the effectiveness of education and prevention approaches
 - And, greater diversity in terms of treatment and the evaluation of what works, in what circumstances and for whom.
- In short, we should have as great a diversity of protections, preventions and treatments as the people who need them.

A concluding thought

- I want to conclude on an optimistic note.
- I think that we have a real opportunity to make progress on gambling related harms prevention and treatment.
- To maximise that opportunity, we need to:
 - harness the good intentions that many of the leaders of the gambling industry are indicating by their words and actions
 - nurture a culture that draws on the widest possible range of skills, knowledge and experience to benefit consumers and the wider public
 - channel everyone's efforts, ideas and talent into tangible improvements for consumers by being clearer about priorities, roles and responsibilities.
- If we all work together, I think we can make real progress that will benefit consumers and wider society. Ultimately that must be a good thing for everyone.

Thank you.