

The industry has much work to do with Local Authorities and The Gambling Business Group intends to lead the way

Charlotte Meller, the new face at the Gambling Business Group, believes much can be achieved by engaging with Local Authorities and explaining the safer gambling measures that operators have put in place on the high street.

Coinslot: The gambling industry suffers from a damaging, and some would say toxic perception portrayed by some on the outside. Why do you think that is and what can you do to address this in your new role with the GBG?

Charlotte Meller: I think it's a complex situation and there's no single definable reason that explains the misperceptions which exist and which undermine the industry. There's a lack of awareness of the measures that are in place - both mandatory and voluntary - in order to protect the very small number of consumers who have problems with a form of entertainment that as the data confirms is enjoyed by over 97 percent of the population.

Secondly, some commentators and politicians operating at both local and national level conflate online and land-based which also engenders a sense of frustration among some elected council members that they have no control over online gambling which percolates through the debate.

On a practical level we need to work hard to raise awareness of the huge undertakings made by the industry in terms of staff training, messaging and supporting research all implemented without the imposition of a mandatory levy. As an industry I think we need to do more in terms of sharing data and intelligence particularly at local levels.

The Gambling Business Group believes there's a real problem with partial facts and the questionable

use of data being accepted by policy makers without any real scrutiny. We are developing an engagement and comms strategy with a clear objective to address this situation, restore reputation and build trust between the industry and its external stakeholders.

Coinslot: As someone who previously worked at the Gambling Commission - what can be done to improve engagement with the Commission and make the relationship more productive?

Charlotte Meller: From my experience a lot of the stumbling blocks can be addressed by establishing clearer lines of communication and we are examining the introduction of a single point of contact between the Commission and the Gambling Business Group.

We also need to have a culture of positive engagement which would entail the industry being part of discussions surrounding proposed changes earlier in the process with our input being sought prior to any policy being drafted.

The industry needs to be given the confidence to continue to be proactive in taking ideas and initiatives to the Gambling Commission on the basis of there being a culture of positive engagement.

Coinslot: Your CV is as the press release announcing the appointment stated 'packed with experience' - of the positions that you've held which will you be drawing on most in your new role and why?

Charlotte Meller: There are elements of several roles to be honest. My time at the Food and Drink Federation provided an insight to

Facts matter

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the workings of a leading trade association, then I gained local and central government experience through my LACORS and Gambling Commission roles, whilst still having engagement with the industry through various projects.

It's all relevant in different ways and I think the experience gained has prepared me well for this next exciting chapter with Peter, Steve and the members of the Gambling Business Group.

Coinslot: What would you say your core skills are and what do you hope to bring to the job?

Charlotte Meller: Partnership working and relationship management have been hardwired through all my roles and I see those skills being crucial in this role - with GBG members with Local Authorities, the Gambling Commission, DCMS and other trade stakeholders.

From my time at the Commission and LACORS I built an extensive network of contacts within the Local Government world and with it a good understanding of their concerns regarding gambling. When I fully understand the extent of the issues that GBG Members are having I can use this knowledge and experience to help deliver solutions.

Coinslot: Based on your experience of the gambling industry and the current political landscape what odds would you offer on the whitepaper being published this year if at all?

Charlotte Meller: Given the current economic challenges and political changes I would be extremely surprised if we see anything this financial year. The new minister will need to revisit and review it - not least as

it's been two years since the call for evidence and technology has moved on.

In the meantime, the GBG will continue to engage with both the DCMS and the Commission to progress issues on its wish list for a future new and progressive Act that's fit for the future.

Coinslot: You joined the Commission over a decade ago - have you been surprised at what the industry has achieved in terms of its safer gambling undertakings in the last ten years?

Charlotte Meller: Totally, and I think you only have to look at the voluntary initiatives implemented by individual operators to combat problem gambling, the way safer gambling is now at the top of the agenda and the introduction of features such as the Consumer Protection Zone at the ICE show as evidence of the progress that's been made.

I have to add that the perception within the Commission and local government at the time I joined was that the industry was lethargic in its approach to consumer protection and trailing behind what the alcohol industry was doing at the time. But there's no doubt the industry has responded extremely well to the challenge and is the exemplar of social responsibility.

Coinslot: We often talk about what the Commission or the DCMS should be doing to improve relations, but having been on the other side of the debate is there more that the industry could be doing as well?

Charlotte Meller: There's always more that the industry can do some of which is quite easily delivered. As we've discussed I believe we can be more open sharing data, we need to remind stakeholders and the public at large of all of the policies and player safeguards that are in place.

I think we should be proud of our premises, reach out to local authorities and invite them to venues. We need to help them understand a sector that they have relatively little dealings with or knowledge of compared to other industries that they license.

Coinslot: What will a typical month look like for you in your role with GBG - how will you be allocating your time and prioritising tasks?

Charlotte Meller: It will be a rapid learning curve as I get to know the GBG members and understand their businesses in order to provide support and advice. I think there needs to be a particular focus on our engagement with Local Authorities and generally progressing the strategic aims of the Gambling Business Group. It's an exciting challenge and one which I'm looking forward to!

Reviewing the review

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