

Peter Hannibal: “The government and the Treasury have to be reminded that these added costs from new regulation will create a financial burden on businesses at an already burdensome time”

Coinslot: How would you look back on 2023?

Peter Hannibal: It's been a busy year on the Gambling Review front to say the least.

At times, it has felt like the DCMS and Gambling Commission were vying with one another for an award in the consultation Oscars of the year.

To think that we are already the most regulated - and red taped industry in the UK - the amount of bureaucratic time that has been exerted on the multitude of consultations has been back-breaking.

And we haven't even got to the final outcome!

As necessary and welcome as the Review is, we are not going to emerge from this with anything like light-touch regulation - in fact, the bureaucratic burden is going to be unmanageable for many.

But as much as we'd rather not re-live the 2023 cycle, here's just a sense of how the year unfolded:

- The early entry came on day 59 with the Commission's consultation including seeking views on changes to reporting suicides;

- On the 117th day the White Paper was finally released;

- Day 207 saw the release of DCMS' Land Based gambling sector consultation and its consultation on online stakes which went head to head with the release of the Commission's Summer consultation;

- Day 290 DCMS' Levy consultation was published;

- A late entry for the Oscar nominations was the Commission's autumn consultation released on day 333!

PETER HANNIBAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE GAMBLING BUSINESS GROUP

Peter Hannibal, CEO of the Gambling Business Group, has taken a measured but probing look back at 2023 - there is much hidden away in the detail he discovers. Spiralling costs and no triennial review is a massive error of judgement on behalf of the powers that be. But throw into that equation the huge impact on costs from new gambling legislation and businesses in our sector are going to struggle. Hannibal wonders whether the Government has thought about this double whammy for the industry - the regulatory train is racing out of the station, but it seems that most of the passengers might not be able to afford the ticket.



- But the year was topped off by the Commission's consultation on changes to financial penalties on day 349.

Coinslot: What have been your highlights over the year? Talk us through some of the key developments in your business.

Peter Hannibal: It was good to start with a successful inaugural appearance at ICE which provided the platform for a bigger and better High Street Hub coming up at the 2024 show.

To be high profile at the world's largest gaming and gambling show is a major boost for the Group and its members.

We've also managed to start cutting into the false narrative

that has prevailed since the Gambling Review process started. Our interventions have helped to turn the tide on the use of 'false facts' with regard to gambling. And it's good to see the Gambling Commission finally understanding the issue - their frustration at the misuse of their own statistics being peddled primarily by the anti-gambling lobby finally led the regulator to issue warnings to stakeholders.

One major success is the progress we have made in cementing our engagement with local authorities through our partnership with the professional body the Institute of Licensing (IOL). We have had regular platforms at their conferences and national training event and they are partnering us for a bespoke ICE day for LAs.

We've also seen local authorities and police forces engaging with our members via training and familiarisation visits.

Coinslot: And the challenges - economic, market development and rising costs? What have been the most concerning?

Peter Hannibal: These have been well documented, and rightly so, throughout the year by businesses and the media.

The assault on the industry from raging utility costs, inflation and interest rates has been

immense. And these are just some of the key challenges to hit all businesses, especially the land based sector.

The message of the pain being caused has definitely got out there; but the pill that can help ease that is simply not being prescribed by the government. A Triennial Review for the industry would be a major part of a cure - but there isn't one on the horizon.

Retail businesses need to see these spiralling costs recede and very quickly, but that only cuts costs. A Triennial Review would go further than that - it would stimulate growth in a national economy which is simply not performing.

And we haven't even factored in the Statutory Levy in this economic model. Whilst costs remain high - and there's no sign of a significant shift until 2025, it's all the more important that the Levy is not set any higher than 0.1 percent for ALL land based businesses.

Coinslot: What objectives have you set the company for 2024? What do you want to be reporting back to us this time next year?

Peter Hannibal: We launched our Responsible Gambling Charter at ICE 23 and having benchmarked our members to it, we are now looking to diversify the charter.

The direction of travel for legislation and regulation in the new gambling landscape is one of social responsibility, and the broader charter needs to reflect that.

It will set out what is expected from our members by way of looking beyond just RG initiatives into a wider social responsibility environment and their contribution to the high street, in order to improve the reputation of high street premises.

We would also want to report back on more engagement with the local regulators - that is crucial especially given the crazy number of local planning applications rejected on unreasonable grounds - only six months later to be overturned on appeal.

And we also want to see our members continue to place the consumer at the heart of everything we do. After all, our customers are our future.

Coinslot: How confident are you about the next twelve months: do you have high hopes for new regulation, an improving economy and growth in your business sector?

Peter Hannibal: A lot depends on the detail of the current raft of White Paper consultations and then how many of them are implemented before a General