

Local authority licence fees must be transparent and any increase allocated to gambling related matters only, says GBG

The Gambling Business Group has called on the government to ensure that local authorities apply full transparency when it comes to setting fee levels for premises licence charges when new gambling legislation hits the statute books.

The trade body will formally present its proposal for full disclosure on licence fees when it submits its gambling review consultation response to the DCMS in mid-September.

Speaking to members ahead of the submission, Charlotte Meller, general manager of the GBG, stated: "The White Paper has opened the door for local authorities to raise their fees to gambling businesses which was widely anticipated when the review was originally undertaken. Our position is very much in line with the DCMS stance that any licence fees must be set on a cost recovery calculation, and not, as many in the industry fear, used as an instrument to recover funds to fill holes in council budgets."

The Gambling Business Group has canvassed its membership on the issue and there were concerns that fees would rise significantly and, more importantly, would not, as the government guidance instructs, "equitate to the cost

LICENCE FEES

The **Gambling Business Group** is looking to move transparency to the top of the local authority agenda when it comes to setting licence fees. This, the trade body says, is the only way fee levels will be fair and the LA's work to be effective.



of providing the service to which the fee relates."

Meller explained: "There is a sense of disappointment among many of our members that the fees do not actually represent the work that the LAs are conducting at the moment. Nearly every gambling business on the high street is governed by the most stringent regulation from both the Gambling Commission and their own councils, and yet there remain illegal operations continuing to trade without local authority

intervention. These illegal traders, who aren't join organisations like the Gambling Business Group, should be closed down and this is not happening."

The illegal market which Meller refers to is of huge concern across the gaming and gambling spectrum. By way of example, outside of the GBG membership reach, there are thousands of illegal machines which continue to be sold on ebay by non-licensed operators; and illegal jukeboxes are on small sites with streaming

Full disclosure

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taking place on Spotify outside of PPL's control.

In fact, evidence has been presented to both the Commission and local authorities identifying the culprits - and yet it continues at pace.

"We think the licence fees should be ring-fenced and allocated directly to the works undertaken that relate solely to gambling matters. It's imperative that we have transparency," Meller added.

"We don't think transparency is an unreasonable proposal - it's already a condition set by regulation. But gambling businesses on the high street are investing millions into their local economy and they need to have the confidence that the funds they deliver to local authorities via the licence fee is effectively used and targeting issues like illegal gambling effectively. And on that, they have the full support of the Gambling Business Group."

"But at the same time," Meller concluded, "the local authority should not increase fees for work that does not relate to gambling business activity."

Southport councillors put on the spot as ITV question future of the pier

PIER

ITV News crews visited Southport Pier on 15 August in order to interview councillors on the future of the heritage attraction, and the progress of structural surveys.

The pier was closed in December last year after reports that storm conditions caused serious damage to the decking, however a reopening date has not been set.

"ITV news crews were pictured interviewing council cabinet member Marion Atkinson on the Pier this morning," reported On The Spot.

"There's still no word about the publication of the much awaited



The Gambling Commission has launched a consultation on affordability checks, but the question remains as to what constitutes as 'financial vulnerability'.

Aimed solely, for now, at the remote sector, the consultation puts forth the regulator's proposal that a financial vulnerability check will be triggered when a customer sustains either: a £125 net loss within a rolling 30 day period; or a £500 net loss within a rolling 365 day period. This check would need to include a customer-specific public record information check, including whether the customer is the subject of a bankruptcy order or court judgement. It

GC launches consultation on financial vulnerability - but doesn't define it

AFFORDABILITY

Even the Gambling Commission's CEO Andrew Rhodes has said that financial vulnerability is, to an extent, "in the eye of the beholder", so how are operators supposed to identify it and take action, asks licensing expert **David Clifton**.

would also need to combine information already provided by the customer, including their postcode and the average salary for their stated employment status and job title. However, the ultimate aim of the check - to determine financial vulnerability - is entirely dependent on knowing what financial vulnerability actually means.

Licensing expert David Clifton doesn't yet see an answer.

"Hopes that a clear definition of 'financial vulnerability' might emerge from this



consultation have not been fulfilled," he explained. "Perhaps there is no surprise there because the UKGC's CEO, Andrew Rhodes, forecast at May's CasinoBeats Summit in Malta a 'fierce

debate about vulnerability', adding that 'to an extent this is in the eye of the beholder'."

Clifton concluded that this may be an area in which the regulator could "produce yet further formal Customer Interaction guidance" to minimise the risk of confusion amongst online operators.

Then again, should the Gambling Commission - or indeed anyone - be deciding which people are ok to spend more than £125 a month on the hobby of their choosing?

structural survey report which is due to expose the series of issues befalling the Pier."

Earlier this month, the council confirmed its commitment to investing the estimated £13m required to repair and reopen the pier, with Atkinson saying "we are not resting on our laurels."

"Our commitment is as clear and unequivocal as it can be. We want a refurbished pier and we will do all we can to work with whoever we need to, to get to that position."

And yet, there's no outline plan.