

Industry

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Industry out in force as it tackles the task of setting the standards for cashless

CASHLESS FORUM

It was a meeting of the industry's technical heavyweights on Wednesday as the **Gambling Business Group** staged a forum to discuss the road to cashless. Industry-wide standards and protocols were top of the agenda as the 50 plus stakeholders set about the plan to clear the way of the obstacles and hurdles to digital payments with gaming machines.

The Gambling Business Group this week staged the most detailed examination by the industry into the technical conditions required for the successful introduction of cashless payments in high street gaming, gambling and leisure operations.

Over 50 stakeholders from all sectors assembled at Lola's in the Hippodrome Casino in London to examine the hurdles and challenges that will shape the commercial and regulatory framework for one of the most important modernisation proposals approved in the Gambling Review White Paper.

Hosted by the GBG, the trade body which has specialised in delivering technical standards that have become the industry's trademark protocols over the years, set the bar both high and wide in terms of addressing the issues. But it's only the start of the process, said Chief Executive Peter Hannibal.

"The day's session featured GBG members, Fin-Tech experts and special guests from across the industry, all of whom understand both the complexities and significant benefits of introducing cashless payments for operations and their customers. The devil, as we know, is always in the detail and this is no exception. It's only when you spend quality time evaluating and fully understanding that detail do you begin to see what we need to do."

And it is a genuine challenge - cashless payments embodies the true essence of the Review: to make the gambling industry and regulation fit for the digital age.

"It was always going to be a test to merge all the conditions that both liberalise and control the payments landscape for our sector. We know the solutions are there - the forum this week con-



firmed that. But as I have said all the way through this, the digital banking commercial model does not currently work with gaming machine play. Operators paying a seemingly small transaction fee on each customer download, becomes a killer blow on revenue after MGD and all of the other existing overheads. It's simply not currently viable, so we have

some considerable work to do with the banks."

Hannibal explained: "That's definitely our key challenge, as indeed is a point that was becoming abundantly clear around the room this week: despite what some in the industry might have naively concluded, the only organisations that currently stand to gain from cashless machine play is the banks."

And that's certainly not to the industry's benefit, nor the customers. And it certainly doesn't sit comfortably with the new government's wish to get businesses driving growth with further investment on the high street.

As Hannibal concluded: "What is critical though is that we get the legislation changed around the prohibi-

tion of debit cards with machine play at this 'once in a generation' opportunity. We cannot afford to miss it! We can take the necessary time to work on the other hurdles once this is done."

That opportunity will be coming shortly; the outcome of these initial discussions will be fed back to the Cross industry Cashless Group and the next steps agreed.

Rob Wheeler: 'time to shift the focus back to machine standards'

One of the key discussions at the GBG's cashless event held this week were based around the processes that will pave the way for cashless with gaming machines. Rob Wheeler outlined the progress of the work done by the GBG's Technical Forum which has been primarily relating to the GBG TiTO Protocols and the systems side of machine operating. For Wheeler, though, that progress had reached the stage where it is now time to shift the focus back to machine standards, and he confirmed that the stewardship to the GBG's Technical Forum has subsequently been handed over to Mark Gibson of Luxury Leisure.

On behalf of all of the GBG Members, Peter Hannibal paid tribute to



Wheeler and the membership of the Technical Forum for the last 10 years hard work and altruistic dedication on what is now established as the industry's ubiquitous set of technical standards.

"It may not be considered the sexiest area of the industry, but the industry cannot move forward or innovate without top quality technical standards to work from, it's what makes us tick," he said. "They're as crucial for machine operators as they are for the consumer journey. The GBG's technical standards have ensured a smooth and consistent platform for the industry - and I am grateful and proud of what Rob has helped us to achieve in this critical part of land based gambling."

"I'll be working night and day to get it reopened": New Southport MP makes pledge on pier

PIER

The newly elected Labour MP for Southport has told constituents he will work "night and day" to get the pier reopened, almost two years after it was closed due to safety concerns.

With Sefton Council still seeking £10m in funding to start recommended repairs, Patrick Hurley stated he will make the restoration project a priority in his plans for the area.

"It's a local authority owned structure," Hurley told The Echo. "We're going



to be implementing as soon as we can a fair funding formula for local authorities so that local councillors, when they get to the town hall, no longer need to make a heart-rending decision and heart-rending choice, for instance between childhood mental health support and funding the repairs and maintenance of the pier."

"We're going to be hopefully looking to see what we can do to allow councillors to do it all. The commitment I'll make is that I'll be working night and day to get it reopened."

The council appointed Thomason Partnership Ltd to carry out the works this year after spending £400,000 on a full structural survey by AE Yates which revealed extensive damage caused mainly by a poor quality renovation completed in 2002.