

## GBG challenges Baroness Twycross on “disappointing” White Paper delays

LEGISLATION

The **Gambling Business Group** has responded to a letter from gambling minister Baroness Twycross which outlined her department's priorities for the coming months with a letter of its own, which states in no uncertain terms the urgent need for delivery of the land-based reforms outlined in the White Paper at a “critical time” for the sector.

Following the receipt of a letter from gambling minister Baroness Twycross outlining her department's legislative priorities - which are distinctly divergent from those desperately required by the industry, The Gambling Business Group has written to highlight the “disappointing” way in which the proposals of the White Paper are “only selectively being progressed” with “no clear definitive road map.”

Quoting the minister's own comments at the GambleAware conference last December that she would work with the industry to “deliver the key reforms” needed, the letter from GBG CEO Peter Hannibal highlighted the piecemeal way in which regulation was being enacted, and the impact on businesses across the country.

“All businesses require certainty to be able to invest and grow,” said Hannibal. “Delivering the remainder of the White Paper in its entirety would help us to help the Government in this objective.”

“It is reassuring to hear that the Government recognises the importance of FECs, bingo clubs and perhaps casinos. It is also helpful to know that the Government appreciates that the FEC sector's GGY is lower than it was before Covid-19 and that you want to see these venues thrive. However, it is not just the FEC sector that is in this position.”

Included in the letter were detailed statistics based on the Gambling Commission's Industry Data, charting the real term decline in consumer spending across all land-based sectors, with reported GGY for 2023/24 the same as it was in 2008/09, representing zero growth in 15 years, against 2.9 percent average annual inflation and a 10 percent growth in population.

It's a stark reality that would normally surprise and stir any government minister into action; however, the industry is increasingly concerned that this gambling minister is beginning to reverse the agreed positioning worked on for over five years labouring through the evidence and data - all of which led to Labour's shadow DCMS team last year supporting the former government's GAR proposals to pave the way for their passage into Parliament - until, that is, before the General Election call.



Instead, Twycross is seemingly stepping back to pre-Gambling Review days with intent to almost start again. And realists are now warning that there is absolutely no reform whatsoever for the industry in the Twycross vision.

Of course, Coinslot can say that - the paper has argued that this minister is an anti-gambling minister. And her absence from duty for so many days in a week due to her other political commitments does make her position untenable. It is surprising that this situation has been allowed to continue at such an important stage in the Gambling Act Review process - and many would consider it naïve in the extreme that a full-time dedicated gambling minister was not appointed immediately. Unless, perhaps, No 10 considered the job a rubber stamping role, in which case a part-time Fiona would have been adequate. Twycross, however, thinks otherwise.

The Gambling Business Group, however, are far more diplomatic and respectful - and with a wider perspective in mind.

“We are aware of the current Government's objective for growth, and to single out subsectors for support is at best a missed opportunity, at worst it is potentially very damaging to those excluded,” Peter Hannibal continued.

“Similarly, singling out Category D machines for a review of stakes and prizes is effectively determining the outcome of a Triennial Review (for all machines) without gathering and evalu-

ating the factual evidence available to inform such a selective decision.”

The fact that the Triennial Review has not rendered any change in stakes and prizes for knocking on 15 years - one doesn't need a graphic representation of the triennial status against, say, the rise in business rates, energy charges, licence fees, to recognise that this is a pretty compelling picture for change.

In terms of other reforms fought for so arduously over the last six years, Hannibal noted there was no mention in Baroness Twycross' letter of “the hard work and effort” DCMS has undertaken in proposals to remove the prohibition of debit cards.

“This change is necessary not for growth or development, it is critical for land-based gambling as a whole.”

Highlighting the additional pressures of the increased employers NICs, increases in National Minimum Wage rates and “the most expensive energy costs in Europe,” Hannibal said “this is therefore a critical time for the whole land-based gambling sector, a time where we need all the help and support it can get, including from you as our Minister for Gambling.”

“We therefore ask that you extend the priorities in your letter to include the delivery of all of the land-based proposals in the Government White Paper in the shortest time scale possible.”

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The Gambling Business Group's letter to Baroness Twycross in full

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