

# IoL members make their mark at the Gambling Business Group's High Street Hub

By The Gambling Business Group

**A**pril saw council officers, police forces and the Gambling Business Group gather in Manchester for a day of discussion and discovery on new technological innovations and safer gambling developments. Workshops, test trials, technology tours of gaming machine manufacturers - the GBG's High Street Hub had many bases covered. And it delivered another step forward in understanding where safer gambling processes have reached and their ever-evolving direction of travel.

It's not often local council officials and police authorities are stars of a trade show, but that was certainly the case during the Amusements & Retail Exhibition (ARE) in Manchester at the end of April.

More than 40 officials from councils and police forces joined the Gambling Business Group on their annual High Street Hub for a day of presentations, forums and tours of industry innovators pushing the envelope on safer gambling technology.

Co-ordinating the assembly was Charlotte Meller, General Manager of the Gambling Business Group, who oversaw the successful programme. "We hosted a comprehensive schedule of workshops and hands-on events which included a number of the industry's leading businesses such as Novomatic, Inspired Entertainment, Boomerang Digital and Innovative Technology who talked the council officials through some of the key developments in safer gambling tools," she explained. "We also had a number of GBG members on hand to

discuss compliance issues and answer questions on the finer detail of many regulations that gambling businesses are applying and implementing."

She added: "We are extremely grateful to the IoL for partnering with us and promoting the event and to all the attendees who engaged so positively with the event." Indeed, the range of workshops during the Hub focused very strongly on licensing matters and player protection with updates on broader issues such as the state of play with the Gambling Act Review by GBG and solicitor TLT and ELIAS Partnership discussing Martyn's Law.

And specifically for IoL representatives, areas covered included compliance data available to LAs when inspecting premises (Boomerang); LPGMPs versus UFECs (Poppleston Allen); digital proof of age (ACCS); staff and customer security in gambling premises (Link Integrated); Positive Play (Better Change); and how LAs can ensure tying back inspections to their Statement of Principles (Betsmart).

Drawn from the Greater Manchester area and beyond, the 40 licensing and police officers were given an insight into the changing face of gambling technology with hands-on tutorials of the very latest innovations currently being used in the gambling industry's social responsibility efforts.

"One of the stand-outs was the age verification system rolling out rapidly at gambling venues throughout the UK which provides a seamless and speedy check on a player's age through advanced facial recognition technology," Meller noted. "I think there was an element of surprise at how sophisticated the technology has become and there was a real sense of interest in the



industry's AV project."

In terms of council and police officer reaction, many of whom trialled the process personally during the day, it was the adaption possibilities to other spheres of operation that also drew attention. "The AV programme is working its way into gaming machines in AGCs, betting shops, bingo clubs and pubs - and has made a significant mark in player ID and protection. The council and police officers were also interested in looking at its potential beyond our sector and have subsequently engaged with those exhibitors," she concluded

### What made Manchester work

This year was the GBG's third High Street Hub; in 2024 over 20 councils were represented at the ICE Expo in London - the world's largest gaming and gambling exhibition and conference which drew over 40,000 businesses and gambling regulators from all over the world.

With a more UK-centric arena for this year's hub, the response to the GBG event was extremely positive. The primary local authority spokesperson noted:

"Thanks to the GBG, IoL and ARE Expo for organising this fabulous interactive session. Great speakers providing details of all the latest developments in gambling along with hands of opportunities to try new and industry adopted technology all in one place."

And the police too were equally enthused. The Greater Manchester Police said: "We are expected to visit gambling premises but we don't get any training. This has been fantastic."

Charlotte Meller observed: "The interest and surprise at how new technology is working was an eye-opener and I think all the officials went away with a greater sense of how big a driving force social responsibility is in our research and development."

### The High Street Hub

One of the primary projects on the Gambling Business Group's agenda is the regeneration of the UK's high streets. And it's a timely one too as the debate has stepped up a notch over the past weeks, getting understandably more charged towards the conclusion of the Gambling Act Review.







It's a project Gambling Business Group chief executive Peter Hannibal has been very actively engaged in. "When the officers saw the age verification developments at Innovative Technology and the data collection at Boomerang Digital, they weren't just surprised, they were enthused by the progress, and interested in how some of the technology can be applied to other age restricted products and services," he told IoL Link.

"There has been a great deal of commentary on high street gambling operations of late, and some has been extremely challenging for the industry. At the same time though, the development of technology as displayed on the High Street Hub presented a real opportunity to look at how the industry is tackling issues with significant advances in Social Responsibility measures," he explained.

"We've found that the evidence and the emotional arguments are not so well aligned and we have strongly campaigned for a more evidential process for the Gambling Act Review. As many will know, we work very closely with the third sector agencies and meet regularly to exchange views and ideas. However, it's always important to address the issues with accurate baseline data which often serve to reassure rather than magnify the concerns - for example, gambling venues in the UK, according to local authority figures provided to the Gambling Commission, have declined for over

a decade with the number of gambling operations currently one third lower than in 2011.

"At the same time, the gross gaming yield is the same now as it was in 2008. These are facts which dispel some of the headlines we often read."

He added: "I sense that when councillors get sight of all the innovations on the High Street Hub in action, examine the gambling activity facts, hear the good works coming out of projects launched through the Gambling Levy and witness the commitment of businesses to local economies, the conversation on the high street will shift."

And Hannibal sees this as an opportunity of seismic proportions.

"We are the one industry that wants to invest in local economies, local communities and local jobs - we are dedicated to the revival of high streets all around the UK with millions and millions being invested. Add to this our commitments through the Statutory Levy, our compliance commitments as one of the most regulated industries in the UK - and some say the world, and our dialogue with bodies such as the IoL and DCMS, councillors will have a far greater understanding of what the industry is doing."

Until then, the High Street Hub will go on the road, of sorts, with the Hub's vision forming part of the discussion when the GBG attends the IoL National Training Conference event later this year. And in 2026 we expect an even bigger coalescence on the High Street Hub in Manchester as plans are in place to expand its presence in the exhibition hall and broaden the scope of conversation.

And, most importantly, over the next 12 months we will also be looking to build on IoL and GBG engagement. During a recent meeting between the GBG and IoL, CEO Paul Adams expressed that the Institute was keen to continue the relationship between both organisations and expand the exchange, and in particular to facilitate a closer working relationship between local authority licensing officers and the industry.



The Gambling Business Group (GBG) is a representation of B2C and B2B gambling organisation members from all sectors of the UK Gambling Industry.