

Report

GBG High Street Hub

“It’s going to be extremely challenging to deliver a robust evidence base to introduce a GIA”: Charlotte Meller explores how Gambling Impact Assessments will impact UK high streets

CHARLOTTE MELLER GAMBLING BUSINESS GROUP

The fourth GBG High Street Hub was one of the highlights of this year’s ARE Expo in Manchester. **Charlotte Meller**, the Gambling Business Group’s General Manager, talks to Coinslot about the Hub and the massive elephant in the current conversation room: Gambling Impact Assessments.

Coinslot: The Gambling Business Group staged its fourth successful High Street Hub at ARE last month. You’ve had some time to reflect on the event and take soundings from attendees. What’s the feedback been like?

Charlotte Meller: There was a very positive response to the two days. The GBG-organised seminars were extremely energised and topical in terms of the issues, and there were good discussions on the High Street Hub stand.

The first day of ARE coincided with the Institute of Licensing’s Gambling Conference and we

facilitated a tour of some of the exhibitors for the conference’s attendees.

Council and police licensing officers were shown a range of player protection measures and systems used in gambling premises and took the opportunity to ask questions about the technological developments.

Coinslot: The GBG described its relationship with the Institute of Licensing as one of its most important engagements, and judging from the ARE Expo, it appears to be a mutual sentiment. Why is it so important?

Charlotte Meller: Partnership working is priceless. Through my time at LACORS and the Gambling Commission I have worked with the IoL for many years and welcome their approach to working with



industry, across all licensing areas.

You get better regulation through mutual understanding and engagement. The GBG and the IoL have the same mindset when it comes to working together and building those relationships.

The High Street Hub provided a perfect assembling point - the IoL was staging its Gambling Conference where I was able to speak, and the Hub enabled IoL delegates to attend our seminars, discuss key issues and also talk to manufacturers and operators which they rarely get the opportunity to do outside of their official duties.

Coinslot: Shock us: what was the main subject of conversation?

Charlotte Meller: Well obviously Gambling Impact Assessments provided the main focus of debate at the IoL Gambling Conference. Both the industry and the IoL have questioned why these new powers are needed and expressed concern over the cost and resource implications.

The powers fly in the face of the Government’s commitments to growth, and to reducing administrative burdens.

The IoL’s Vice Chair David Lucas in his interview with Coinslot a few weeks ago didn’t pull any punches when he spoke of the GIAs - and to hear that echoed around the IoL Conference was quite unprecedented.

The universal agreement was that it’s going to be extremely challenging to

deliver a robust evidence base to introduce a GIA.

Coinslot: Why’s that?

Charlotte Meller: The implied intention is that the Local Authority is going to have to evidence the additional impact a new Licensed Gambling Premise in their area will have on the Licensing Objectives. But no one yet understands how this is to be done with any acceptable level of accuracy.

For example, we need a definition of the impact assessment itself - in particular, exactly what is it measuring and what are acceptable levels of impact? It’s definitely not a measurement of the moral or religious dislike of gambling premises.

If the measurement has to somehow be related to one or more of the licensing objectives, what metrics will be used and where will the evidence come from?

Generalisations and averages used as evidence won’t stand up to scrutiny when it comes to specific premises.

At this point in time there are too many unanswered questions which we are told the guidance the Gambling Commission and DCMS are going to produce will shed light on.

Coinslot: And are you getting the same kind of feedback from other bodies on these views?

Charlotte Meller: Ian Graham from the Met’s Licensing Unit spoke at the Conference and said that there hadn’t been any reviews of gambling licences in London. And the

The data desert

Charlotte Meller said...

“...you cannot include gambling data drawn from online gambling, lottery sales, scratchcards, casino or pub data etc into the GIA for a small arcade operator, for example. How is a local authority going to get that granularity of data? We can’t even determine rates nationally. The gap between problem gambling rates using the Gambling Commission’s GSGB and the National Health study is vast...”

Commission itself tends to lead on "fair and open" objectives.

So that really leaves us with "protecting the young and vulnerable from harm".

And this obviously leads us to one of the key questions: how do you measure problem gambling rates locally.

Coinslot: Does anyone have the answer to this?

Charlotte Meller: To be honest, not at this point in time.

If there are only four types of gambling licences in the scope of a GIA (ie AGCs, Betting, Bingo and FECs), then surely the local evidence base can only relate to those licence types.

So, you cannot include gambling data drawn from online gambling, lottery sales, scratchcards, casino or pub data etc into the GIA for a small arcade operator, for example.

How is a local authority going to get that granularity of data?

We can't even determine rates nationally. The gap between problem gambling rates using the Gambling Commission's GSGB and the National Health study is vast.

And at the same time, much of the harm comes from illegal black market sites run out places like Russia and across the globe, and that data cannot be included in the GIA evidence base.

The general consensus is that GIA amendment has added a significant complication to the licensing process. But we look forward to working with the Commission and DCMS on developing the guidance and we trust they will engage with the IoL and draw on the lessons learned from licensing officers in dealing with Cumulative Impact Assessment under the Licensing Act 2003.

Coinslot: Will the industry positives play any part in the GIA?

Charlotte Meller: High street gambling is one of the most regulated industries and the GIAs haven't been considered within that context.

Applications already run to many pages, citing policies and measures in place to uphold the licensing objectives, to meet any local council requirements in their Licensing Policy Statements and Local Area Profiles, (even when those LA documents are not up to date).



All those measures and innovations will need to be explained in more detail in any applications in GIA areas in the future. Licensing officers and councillors on licensing committees are welcome to visit premises to see these measures in situ.

Coinslot: Can we take you back to the High Street Hub itself. You had a mix of offerings from workshops, machine demonstrations and a breakfast meeting with the bookies. How did it all go?

Charlotte Meller: I think the High Street Hub helped crystallise the measure of the work of the GBG.

Our goal is continue to be the respected voice for cross sector land based gambling with social responsibility at the heart of everything we do.

Therefore, we have a broad church membership of operators all facing the same high street challenges. Our B2B membership has also broadened considerably so we can draw even more on the expertise of manufacturers, suppliers, legal, compliance, recruitment and consultants.

One thing is certain, we want to continue to support that broad church in our High Street Hub offerings at future events.

Coinslot: So, what next for the Hub? Is it going to go on the road? Take a place at other events such as Park Avenue, ACOS, The Pub Show etc?

Charlotte Meller: We are in discussions with the ARE organisers about 2027 but that's all I can say at this point in time. But, as they say, watch this space!

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