

Industry

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Licensing inspections up, but gambling problems... are nowhere to be seen

There seems to be a huge disconnect between the anti-gambling MPs who know almost nothing about gambling venues on their high streets, and the local authority bodies that regulate them.

That's one of the glaring early conclusions to be drawn from the latest regulatory returns submitted by LAs to the Gambling Commission.

The disconnection gap can clearly be measured by the number of licensing officer inspections at gambling venues - and subsequent absence of any reports of social order or breach of conditions, and the unsubstantiated claims of rampant gambling harm vocalised by prohibitionist MPs without evidence.

INSPECTIONS ON THE RISE

Charlotte Meller, General Manager of the Gambling Business Group, has been analysing the statistics as they roll in and her findings are proving even more startling.

She explained: "The latest statistics released by the Commission reveal that significantly more inspections were undertaken last year than the previous year, a possible response to the noise created by the anti-gambling lobby, but almost certainly a reaction to the disappointment expressed last year by the Commission over the lack of LA activity on this front."

FOCUS ON OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

But she was quick to add a rider: "Having said that, much of the data released so far will undoubtedly irk the anti-gambling lobby. The most obvious point being that of this increased level of inspections, the momentum was actually inspections of 'other' venues, typically pubs, rather than

INSPECTIONS

The latest local authority statistics have revealed a gaping hole between national perception and local reality. And it seems the prohibitionists are living in a world of make believe. **Charlotte Meller** of the Gambling Business Group has been studying the results and has discovered some fascinating stats - and they won't please the Prime Minister nor the Mayor of Brent - both vocal anti-gambling advocates.



gambling operations."

LOL: GAMBLING PREMISES DO NOT CAUSE PROBLEMS

Now there is one word of note ahead of breaking down these statistics further: we must remember that the Institute of Licensing told Coinslot a few months ago that licence officials do not regard gambling venues as a problem on the high street. Quite the reverse, problems associated with gambling venues don't even register as rare on their high street problem richter scale.

And, according to Meller, it isn't

just the licensing officers. "The Police in London have never reviewed a gambling premises licence according to the Chief Licensing Officer at the Met Police," she noted.

During her analysis, Meller has been conscious of the work licensing officers do in general, most of which is simply not acknowledged by government or even their councillors.

She explained: "The GBG has a good partnership with the Institute of Licensing and our views on the statistics is not a dig at LAs, it's just a reflection on the fact that the reality of what is happening on the ground is not the narrative being heard in the corridors of Parliament - and that needs to change."

It would be fair to say that the latest licensing authority figures seem to reinforce this view.

RETURNS LOW ON PRIORITY LIST

Running through the highlights, one in particular will stand out: 29 of the 350 local authorities so far haven't felt it necessary to file their statutory returns, reflecting the wide-held view that they do not consider gambling important enough to even to lodge a return.

But Meller delved deeper into the figures, revealing: "A further 124 did not undertake inspections at all. And when you look at the remaining councils, 197 did conduct 'some inspections', although it was only 41 of those that were

undertaken as a mix of gambling premises and "other" visits."

AN OWN GOAL FOR THE BRENT LETTER FANS

Amid the pretty febrile debate currently going on, it's important to highlight that there is one figure that will really strike an own goal for signatories to the high profile Brent Council letter to kill Aim to Permit, signed last year by mayors and leaders of 50 councils around the country.

And even Meller was surprised. She reported: "Eight of those signatory councils didn't conduct an inspection of a gambling premises over the past year - while three haven't even sent their returns in."

THE MANCH-URIAN CANDIDATE

And her additional findings will not make for good reading in No 10 Downing Street. She explained: "What might prove most embarrassing is that one of those authorities that did not undertake an inspection was Manchester, at the time under the Mayoral leadership of Andy Burnham - the new Prime Minister and primary advocate of the latest soundbite campaign of anti-gambling."

But it doesn't get any better for the prohibition lobby as the returns come in. Given the veracity of the arguments presented by the author of the Brent Council letter - the authority returns show that Brent conducted just 10 inspections - and that's out of the

75 gambling premises its register shows as currently operating.

BRENT'S FAILINGS ARE THE INDUSTRY'S SUCCESSES

It was a point Meller felt needed further examination. She explained: "This is actually quite important for context - in many authorities, when there are no issues raised, inspections are not undertaken. And this seems to be the case in Brent."

For clarity, Brent Council's Gambling Needs Assessment written in 2024 states that the council's Licensing Team are responsible for inspecting whether the operation of high priority establishments remain in line with policy each year (e.g. whether CCTV cameras work) - but unless there are official complaints, there is no obligation to investigate any further.

And Meller drew the obvious conclusion: "Since no issues have been reported across the 80-odd gambling premises in Brent, in at least the last five years, none have had to face any scrutiny on whether the preventative measures in place have worked to deter crime and protect vulnerable populations."

SO, IS THIS TIME FOR A CHANGE OF TONE?

And here lies a conundrum for the abolitionists such as Dawn Butler, Andy Burnham, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, Brent Council et al - where's the evidence for wanting to remove Aim to Permit, increase business rates or raise MGD?

Somehow in the answer, we'll likely find that it's just another day in the world of privileged, high income, middle class professionals telling their working class constituents what they can and cannot do.

The British public don't all want to live by your moral code.

Cosmo Bingo building nominated for Salford heritage status

BINGO

The building housing Cosmo Bingo in Eccles has been nominated for inclusion on Salford City Council's Local Heritage List, recognising its architectural and community significance.

Originally built as a purpose-built cinema in the early 1900s, the Edwardian



Baroque building was converted into a bingo hall during the 1980s and has continued to serve as a community entertainment venue for more than four decades.

A six-week public consultation on the proposed Local Heritage List will run from 3 August to 14 September before the list is formally adopted. Unlike national listed

status, inclusion on the Local Heritage List would not prevent alterations to the building but would require its historic and architectural significance to be considered during future planning decisions.

The venue has been operated by BoyleSports-owned Cosmo Bingo since the bookmaker acquired the bingo business in 2019.