



## **Consultation on proposals for changes to Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility Measures – Submission from Dartford Labour Party**

Dartford Labour Party recognises the prevalence of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) in betting shops, often referred to in the media as “the crack cocaine of gambling”. We believe that these machines are highly addictive, and that people's lives have been devastated as a result of their use - specifically, the ability of users to stake a maximum of £100 a spin, every 20 seconds.

Research and testimony, together with the experience of Labour Councillors and community activists in Dartford, has highlighted the damaging impacts that FOBTs have had on individuals. This has included building up ruinous levels of personal debt to fund addiction to FOBTs, depression and the breakdown of family relationships.

We strongly believe that the government should bring forward several changes to the law to significantly reduce the harm FOBTs can do to our community. Specifically;

The maximum stake on FOBTs (B2 gaming machines) should be reduced from the current £100 to a stake of £2 to bring it in line with other gaming machines. Evidence from the Campaign for Fairer Gambling and other organisations involved in the prevention of problem gambling indicates that a reduction to £2 is the change that would have the most impact in the prevention of harmful use of these machines. As such, we believe any smaller reduction should be discounted and there is no evidence to support that potential maximum stake of £50 would be safe.

We support a reduction of the maximum stake for B2 machines of £2 and therefore do not support an increase in any other machines (primarily B3) stake going beyond £2.

We are concerned that the use of debit cards as a form of payment on FOBTs has led to an increase to the amount of money staked and consequently completely reject any proposal for contactless payments to be available as part of any gambling product.

We believe that additional powers should be granted to local authorities to protect the wellbeing of their communities by stopping the proliferation and impact of betting shops in District, Boroughs and Unitary Authority areas.

This would include changes to planning legislation to provide planning authorities ability to reject all applications to open betting shops (including change of use applications) if authorities feel that additional betting shops would make the prevalence too high.

Planning authorities should also have the ability to reject an application if they can evidence that proposed location of the new betting shop may encourage problematic gambling or misuse.

Local authorities should be granted increased funding for public health in recognition that there is a complete lack of support for the issue of problem gambling compared to drugs or problem drinking.

We also have serious concerns about the staff who work in the shops with FOBT's in them. One third of the machines are smashed every year, meaning the call outs to betting shops by Police are far above the average to other high street shops and far more than those to other gambling premises such as bingo halls or casinos. Most have only one member of staff in the store at any one time, in fact the numbers of all employees by betting shops has fallen significantly. We believe that the government should work in partnership the trade unions and the industry do ensure that employers adequately exercise a duty of care to betting shop staff to protect them from harassment and resources are redirected from the gambling to support staff who have suffered, or are at risk of suffering, increased levels of stress in the workplace,

We would welcome additional restrictions placed on the advertising of gambling, particularly online. The relationship between the gambling industry and professional sports is in need of review. We would welcome the government considering similar restrictions on the advertising of gambling at sports events and during sports coverage on television and online that are currently in place in respect of tobacco products.

**Councillor Jonathon Hawkes, Leader of the Labour Group of Councillors on Dartford Borough Council. Submission made on behalf of Dartford Labour Party**