

I am writing as Leader of the Labour Group on Medway Council and as someone who is a long standing advocate for the reduction in the stakes on B2 Machines from the current £100 to a stake of £2 to bring it in line with other gaming machines.

I have no doubt, not least from the amount of personal testimony I have heard from both Medway residents and from others further afield of the damaging impact that Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) have had on individuals – more than other gaming products. Residents have shared their stories which have included losing their homes, their jobs and their families and in the very worst cases have seen people take their lives. From a very personal perspective, one of my closest friends was addicted to FOBTs for a number of years and this had a huge detrimental impact on relations with family, friends and work colleagues.

As an advocate for B2 machines going to a stake of £2 I do not support the increase in any other machines (primarily B3) stake going beyond £2 which I know is proposed by some within the industry.

It is right to recognise there needs to be greater powers available to local government regarding this whole area, including adequate funding for public health recognising there is a complete lack of support for the issue of problem gambling compared to drugs or problem drinking.

I would reject any notion of contactless payments being available as part of any gambling product.

I recognise that the wider issues of gambling advertising and online gambling continue to have impacts on communities. I believe these areas should be kept under regular review and would encourage suitable safeguards to be put in place. Increasing numbers of residents have raised with me concerns about levels of gambling advertising both on TV and online as well as sports sponsorship – this may be the time to consider a similar approach to gambling advertising that has previously been taken to tobacco companies regarding tournament and team endorsements.

I would also want the department to consider the increasing issue of “skin gambling” with the recent Gambling Commission report highlighting 1 in 10 11-16 year olds had taken part in this activity. I appreciate there are no simple solutions to this matter but I would hope the DCMS will give this appropriate attention moving forward.

In conclusion, for many years I have been calling on the government to stop the harm that has come from FOBTs in Medway and across the country – I genuinely

hope that this consultation will lead to the end of this product in it's current format damaging our communities.