

## Minutes of Meeting

### **The first inquiry session of the Gambling Related Harm All Party Parliamentary Group's Inquiry into: "online gambling"**

**Date:** Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March

**Time:** 14.00pm – 16.30pm

**Location:** Room U, Portcullis House

**Chair:** Carolyn Harris MP

**Minutes taken by:** Sonia Kharaud, Interel UK

#### **Evidence Heard From:**

##### **First Session**

- Clare Mills, Headway
- Luke Greggs, Headway
- George, brain injury victim

##### **Second Session**

- Ann Webster, Conservative Christian Fellowship
- Ben Clubbs, Cauldron, Witness
- Liz Ritchie, Gambling with Lives

##### **Third Session**

- Alex Macey, problem gambler
- Danny Cheetham, problem gambler
- Brian Chappell, witness, Justice for Punters

##### **Members Present**

Lord Chadlington

Carolyn Harris MP

Jim Shannon MP

Ronnie Cowan MP

Lord Foster

Stuart McDonald MP

### First Session 14.10 – 15.00

- **Carolyn Harris MP (Chair)** began the evidence session of the APPG by welcoming Luke Greggs, George and Claire Mills and asked them to introduce themselves.
- **Luke Greggs** introduced the session and told the APPG that he was the Director of Communications at Headway the brain injury charity, which works to improve life after a brain injury. He explained that every 90 seconds someone is admitted to hospital with a brain injury and with most needing some form of short or long-term help. This is because a brain injury can change behaviours and the personality of those affected. A brain injury can lead to a lack of insight, repetitive behaviour, disinhibition, impaired reasoning, impulsivity, obsessive behaviour and memory problems. He said this is why those that suffer from brain injuries are prone to gambling related harm.
- He went onto explain that depression and anxiety are also traits common after a brain injury. This can lead to social isolation, he said, which leads people with (ABI) acquired brain injury to turn to the internet which provides a sense of community.
- **Luke Greggs** mentioned that the other factor that should be considered is the significant compensation payments that is given to people with ABI to help them secure accommodation and rehabilitation after the injury. A lot of the time this money is given to young men and young women who are “vulnerable”.
- **Carolyn Harris MP**, then asked George, who has ABI, to share his story with the group.
- **George** explained how he had, after his accident, developed several of the traits that Luke Greggs had mentioned, including depression, anxiety and obsessive behaviour. A few months before he received a compensation payment from the Government, he had visited a Casino with some of his friends.
- **George** showed the Chair a list of bank statements with transactions to highlight how severe his gambling addiction was, he highlighted that he had lost £67,000 in 40 minutes on one online gambling site. He mentioned that when he gambled that amount of money, no checks were required. He also mentioned that on one occasion he won £300,000 online, however, he did not receive a pay-out.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked George if he had ever gambled prior to his injury.

- **George** explained that before the injury he had never gambled, he had only been to a casino once. However, after his accident and the injection of cash from the Government, his addiction was sparked. He blamed gambling advertising for feeding this addiction.
- **Clare Mills** asked what reaction the online companies had when told about his brain injury.
- **George** said most online companies had ignored him when he alerted them to his injury, but he also said a number of them reimbursed him. He had received two types of replies, either automated or from online gambling companies asking him to stop harassing them.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked if he had contacted the Gambling Commission for help.
- **George** said his interaction with the Gambling Commission was disappointing and described them as “pathetic.”
- **Lord Chadlington** asked how many times George had written to them.
- **George** said he had written to the Gambling Commission over 100 times and had only received two replies stating that they would look into his case. He felt that the Gambling Commission were not understanding of his situation and mental state.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked if George was still gambling.
- **George** said no.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked him how he had managed to stop gambling.
- **George** said if he had the money, he would continue to gamble but he has lost it all to his gambling addiction.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked if the only reason he was not gambling was as a result of his financial situation.
- **George** said he had been given some of his money back, however, he is now in a lot of debt that he feels compelled to gamble more to recoup his money. He noted a time when he had won £270,000, however the company refused to pay-out until two weeks later, which incentivised him to gamble the money away.

- **George** said that he had now joined GamStop, a gambling self-exclusion scheme that allows him to put controls in place to help restrict his online gambling activities, but this had not been useful to him.
- **Lord Foster** asked about GamStop and how George had bypassed this technology. He said he wanted to stop people in the future from doing this and asked what more could be done to make the technology more effective.
- **George** said the main issue with GamStop was that there was no stopping an addict from creating a new profile under a different name or email address. In fact, George said he had opened four new email accounts just so he could gamble.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked whether he was using the same bank account and cards when opening new emails.
- **George** confirmed that he was using all the same bank accounts and cards. He then said that since his injury gambling was his only bit of excitement and now, he can't escape it. He added that how a brain injury is a hidden condition that people tend to ignore.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked if this was indicative of a brain injury and whether it can lead to these problems.
- **Clare Mills** said it was due to the repetitive behaviour and lack of insight that a brain injury causes as well as access to money coupled up with how easy it is to gamble from a phone.
- **George** went on to describe the advertising techniques being used by online gambling companies. He explained that companies email and text him offers even if he is no longer using that site.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked whether the online companies continued to send emails encouraging George to gamble, after they had found out about his injury.
- **George** confirmed that this was the case and that he still received emails from online gambling companies he had self-excluded from, encouraging him to play.
- **Clare Mills** shared that some recent academic studies had made the connection between brain injury and gambling issues. One of the studies found that gambling addicts that didn't have alcohol or drug dependency, many of them had a brain injury. She said the impact a brain injury can have, especially on the frontal lobe, is increased impulsiveness, risk taking and effect their decision making capacity. One study highlighted that those with a history of brain injury are 27% more likely to have a gambling

problem and were more likely to gamble and were more likely to take bigger risks.

- **Lord Chadlington** asked George what online gambling companies did when he had asked to be self-excluded from their sites and offers and whether they continued to send him emails.
- **George** confirmed that this was the case, he said he continued to get offers and advertisements every day, especially from Sky Casino.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked again whether George had contacted the Minister or the Gambling Commission.
- **George** confirmed that he had contacted the Gambling Commission, but did not feel the appropriate action had been taken.
- **Lord Foster** asked if the instances he had been compensated by online gambling companies, why did he think he received this compensation.
- **George** said he had been made to sign non-disclosure agreements by some online companies, to stop him talking, after he had been compensated. Some online companies have refunded his money after George alerted them to his injury but other companies have ignored him.
- **George** also added that he had been harassed by the police because of an email he had sent to one of the online gambling companies explaining that their actions had been distressing. The police came to his home and threatened George with an ASBO and an arrest if he continued. George's Mum also explained how she had been shaken by the experience.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked what he would be arrested for.
- **Claire Mills** said for trying to get his money back.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** concluded the first session asking the witnesses what they felt the APPG could do to help them.
- **George** asked if someone could write to gambling companies on his behalf asking whether they think their actions are justified.
- **Lord Foster** said a system whereby self-exclusion actually leads to the end of promotional emails and contact with gambling companies would be helpful. Lord Foster said it shouldn't be so easy to get around this by simply changing your name and email address. He said his understanding was that these were rules that currently exist, however, these are not being followed. He asked George to provide him with examples of specific companies who he has emailed asking to be self-excluded and have still send him advertisements.

- **Clare Mills** mentioned that George had been in touch with his local MP, James Duddridge to write to the gambling companies on George's behalf.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** said the APPG would be happy to intervene on George's behalf and represent him, especially with those companies he is having problems with. She said the APPG would highlight to companies that their constant advertising is not acceptable, and would look to change the system to help others.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked George to provide the APPG with evidence to help them make representations on his behalf. She thanked the witnesses and Headway for talking to the Members.

### **Second Session 15:02 – 15:30**

- **Carolyn Harris MP (Chair)** began the session by introducing all the witnesses and thanking them. She introduced Gambling with Lives which she explained was created by Liz and Charles Ritchie after their son Jack died. She asked Ann Webster and Ben Clubbs to share their experiences with the group.
- **Ann Webster** explained that her family had suffered generational harm from gambling. Her dad and brother were not harmed by online gambling, however, the third generation of her family had experienced gambling harm from online. Ann Webster explained that she is a prison volunteer and a retired headteacher. During her trips to prison, she said she met several young individuals who had a problem with gambling. She described herself as a non-expert stakeholder on the issue.
- **Ann Webster** explained that the gambling industry is not sufficiently regulated, and that young people are not being protected. She said, "gambling harms lives and costs lives."
- She wants society to learn from the mistakes that were made before the regulation of alcohol and cigarettes. There was a robust evidence base that these substances were harmful, however there was a significant time delay in implementing regulations and safeguards, which resulted in the loss of many lives. She said we should have learnt from the lessons of history, when there is a robust evidence base like there is for gambling addiction, then there should not be a delay in regulating this.
- She went onto say, mental health makes people vulnerable, and society has an extra duty of care to protect the young and vulnerable. Just like George, it was trauma which sparked the gambling addiction in Ann Webster's family.

- **Carolyn Harris MP** thanked Ann Webster for her contribution and then asked Ben to tell the APPG about his friend Jack.
- **Ben Clubbs** discussed how his friend, Jack, had become addicted to gambling. They became friends at age 11 and together with Ethan, their other friend, they remained friends until Jack's death. He described Jack as a bubbly, clever and funny boy. However, once Jack entered sixth form he was introduced to betting shops and started online gambling. Ben said he became socially withdrawn and a lot more competitive and anxious when he was losing. His school work and social life was majority effected, Ben explained.
- **Ben Clubbs** explained that Jack had first been encouraged to gamble after winning a large amount of money online. He got offered a £10 free bet and then £300 in free bets which induced him into gambling. He explained that his friend would play until he won and didn't stop because of targeted advertising and bombardment of emails from online gambling companies.
- **Ben Clubbs** said, the addiction eventually stole Jack's life. The impact of Jack's death had a massive effect on himself and his childhood friend Ethan, who also died from a drug overdose. Ben said Ethan's passing away was partially caused by Jack' death which was caused by online gambling. He said addiction to online gambling is an "addiction by design" because of the targeted emails, texts and offers.
- **Ronnie Cowan MP** mentioned that when gambling companies pay out, it could encourage gamblers to use this money to continue gambling. He asked the witnesses what the APPG could do to help break the cycle.
- **Ben Clubbs** said products need to be risk assessed before going onto the market to see how dangerous they are in inducing addictive behaviours.
- **Ronnie Cowan MP** asked how the APPG could get the right help and support out for those who wanted to beat the addiction.
- **Liz Ritchie** said there should be a system to allow gamblers to properly self-exclude, she asked the APPG to look at the treatment network for gamblers, which she described as appalling and terrifying. She said we need a statutory levy to pay for it.
- **Jim Shannon MP** said more focus needs to be placed on education to show that gambling is an addiction like alcohol and sex and GPs need to be properly informed about how they can deal with inquiries when they come up.
- **Stuart McDonald MP** said this was taking responsibility away from online companies, which have a fantastic amount of data on how individual

people gamble. Gambling companies would have known Jack's gambling habits better than Jack did, because of this data they have. He said, there are so many opportunities for a company to intervene and spot dangerous play to stop gambling. Online gambling companies should put limits on bets and limits on time play.

- **Stuart McDonald MP** said the decision was made that FOBT's are dangerous, but this decision also needs to be made about online tools.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** said that she had managed to do it with FOBTs and said the same needs to be done to influence policy.
- **Jim Shannon MP** explained to Ben that he was impressed by his story but that he thought that people were different, and that some individuals can be tempted to gamble, and others cannot. Discussing a levy on companies Jim Shannon asked whether a levy was enough to restrain online companies. He explained that more protections were needed online and if a levy was going to be put in place it would need to hit companies hard.
- **Liz Ritchie** disagreed with Jim Shannon's comment that some people are different. She said this was not the case because everyone could be addicted to Heroin because of the morphine receptors in the brain. She said, it is easy to become addicted to gambling and just like heroin, gambling is a physical addiction and companies use data to make addictions worse. She said, the model of addiction needs clearing up and that she was "very concerned by this level of ignorance."
- **Ann Webster** agreed with Liz Ritchie that gambling is an addiction just like an addiction to drugs, alcohol and cigarettes is. She said the Government and industry have to work together to act help the treatment of gambling addiction because currently not enough money is being spent on treatment programmes.
- **Lord Chadlington** thanked the witnesses for giving evidence.

*The MPs left briefly to vote and Lord Chadlington temporarily took over as Chair.*

### **Third Session 15:30 – 16.30**

- **Lord Chadlington** began the session by thanking all "courageous" witnesses for their time. He then began the third session by introducing all the witnesses and thanking Alex Macey, Danny Cheetham and Brian Chappell for giving evidence.



- **Alex Macey** shared that his gambling addiction was sparked after playing in arcades on the fruit machines. He stole money from his mother's purse to pay for his addiction. However, throughout this childhood, he remained gamble free. Once he started earning money, he spent his earnings on fruit machines and on FOBT machines.
- **Alex Macey** at age 22 became a police officer and the money available to him dramatically increased. He said at this age he became a fully-fledged pay day gambler online, until two years ago when he was able to stop gambling. He said dealing with the job and a gambling addiction was hard and online gambling companies made it even harder. He could spend 5 hours on a FOBT and lose £1,000, £2,000, however, online he said it was "ridiculous stakes." He would play for more than 10 hours constantly and would bet up to £500 a go. Just before he stopped gambling, he took two 5,000 loans and gambled that away too.
- He mentioned that he had received therapy paid for by the police, however, he continued to fall back into online gambling. This is because he had received a promotional flyer in the post even though he had self-excluded from the online gambling company which sent it. He called the company to complain but nothing was done. He had also self-excluded from other online gambling companies, but they were still sending him promotional material.
- He counted that he had 75 online gambling accounts and on each one there was no interaction with a human, despite the fact that it was clear he was a problem gambler. He submitted a complaint to the Gambling Commission, telling them the rules had been broken, however they told him that they did not deal with individual complaints. He also submitted the complaint to the Parliamentary ombudsmen.
- **Lord Foster** asked who Alex Macey thought was responsible for investigating those individual breaches which he had suffered. Lord Foster explained that he was not totally naive and knew the answer to his own question, however, he needed to ask it to understand Alex Macey's understanding.
- **Alex Macey** said it was the Gambling Commission's responsibility.
- **Brian Chappell** said there was no one to help gambling addicts. He explained that when an individual has submitted evidence to the Gambling Commission, the Commission can decide whether to investigate a case or not. The individual will not be informed that their case is being considered and no feedback is provided. If a company does get fined and the individual asks whether their evidence influenced this, they will not be told.
- **Lord Chadlington** asked Alex Macey what had ignited his gambling addiction.

- **Alex Macey** said it was the promotional flyer through the door that had triggered him to gamble again. He said there was two way accountability with online gambling companies, and he called on them to take more responsibility.
- **Lord Chadlington** asked if Alex Macey still got the urge to gamble even though he had stopped.
- **Alex Macey** explained that he could not walk passed a bookmaker without wanting to go in.
- **Danny Cheetham** explained how he had been addicted to drugs and gambling. However, he received a significant amount of support to fight his drug addiction but not for his gambling addiction. He was taking out several pay day loans, joined different sites to chase loyalty schemes and got himself into debt.
- He went onto say that before his mother passed away, his addiction was so strong that he would gamble online on his phone rather than spend time speaking to his ailing mother. He became socially isolated because gambling came first. He only managed to stop his gambling addiction by putting in hurdles through technology. He began to use Monzo bank account and was able to start blocking transactions. Monzo also stopped him from taking cash out of his account.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** said Barclays and Starling also provide this blocking technology.
- **George** from session one intervened to make the point that this blocking technology was not so sophisticated. For example, if you download the Barclay's app you can turn off the blocking software by a click of a button.
- **Danny Cheetham** said in contrast, if you try and turn off the blocking software on Monzo, you have to speak to a staff member of Monzo and there is a 48 hours cooling off period before the blocking technology is lifted. The other banks do not seem to do this he said.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** questioned why banks could stop certain transactions but not others. She gave an example of how she had recently attempted to book a holiday online and the bank had blocked her card. She said there was an anomaly in the system.
- **Danny Cheetham** explained he had gambled on credit cards.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** explained that the APPG had written to the Managing Directors of all the major banks and is seeking to write to the major credit card companies.

- **Carolyn Harris MP** asked Danny Cheetham what would he like the APPG to do.
- **Danny Cheetham** said loyalty schemes should not be freely given out and this targeted advertising should be changed.
- **Lord Chadlington** asked if Danny Cheetham had stopped gambling.
- **Danny Cheetham** said it had been two years since he had gambled, and this was due to the technology.
- **Lord Chadlington** said more needs to be done to look at online systems like chat rooms to help people stop gambling.
- **Brian Chappell** explained that he had gambled safely since the age of eight, however he began to fall out with the gambling industry 45 years ago. He said, the gambling industry has done exactly what the tobacco industry has done by putting the blame of the addiction onto the person. He said the best way to deal with gambling addiction would be by dealing with the companies first because they already have systems in place to solve most of the issues.
- **Brian Chappell** was asked what all these gambling issues had in common and said:
  - Failed deposits;
  - Deposits varying from under £10 to £1000 within 24 hours;
  - Multiple methods of depositing within one day;
  - Reverse withdrawals;
  - losses averaging over 1k per month without income checks;
  - VIP Managers regularly receiving desperate pleas from customers for an extra bonus;
  - Gambling on many obscure sports;
  - Gambling for over eight hours including through the night;
  - Breaching self-exclusion by changing an email address and no personal details changing.
- He said these issues have one thing in common and that is that online gambling companies never admit they are wrong. He said they have clearly missed signs of gambling disorders. Despite the technology they have which can identify these issues, he said they still blame the person. He called for more focus on the industry
- He also gave examples of two case studies, which he said highlighted why more emphasis needed to be placed on the industry.

- **Case study one:** was of an individual named Sean who had no permanent address on any of his betting accounts, the one he was using was his Mum's old house which he had gambled away. None of his details were valid and he did not have a job. Sean had lost well over £200,000 in six weeks to online gambling sites. He explained that Sean went to the Gambling Commission and alternative dispute resolution, but they had not been helpful. He said this was absolutely 'ludicrous.'
- **Case study two:** In his second example a man named Eric had won £1,500. The online gambling site wanted to see his bank statements and pay slips before giving him the money. Brian Chappell explained that it was ludicrous that their systems had picked up a £100 bet and asked him to prove his income, even though he had an account with the online site for two years. Eric eventually got paid his winnings, five weeks after he was contacted. Brian Chappell said it is an industry wide policy in Casinos to delay withdrawals, to give gamblers time to lose the money.
- **Brian Chappell** went onto say that the fastest he had an account closed was in 90 minutes because the online gambling company had calculated that he was going to win in 90 minutes. He said it was false that gambling companies cannot identify people with gambling disorders online. He said gambling employees are also encouraged to hand out more offers to those that are losing to keep them gambling.
- He went onto say that since 2005 the gambling market had not been regulated enough, it had ignored the rise in problem gamblers, and not enough was being done to make the market safe.
- **Carolyn Harris MP** thanked all the witnesses for attending and giving their evidence and stated that the next APPG meeting would be on the 24<sup>th</sup> April at 2pm.

**Meeting concluded at 16.30pm**

## External Guests

- Tosin Adedayo, Interel UK (Secretariat)
- Katherine Morgan, Interel UK (Secretariat)
- Holly Ramsey, Interel UK (Secretariat)
- Sonia Kharaud, Interel UK (Secretariat)
- Dr Sarah Bunn, Chief Scientific Advisor
- Wes Himes, Remote Gaming Association
- Simon Thomas, Hippodrome
- Paul Terroni, Novomatic
- Matt Zarb-Cousin, GamBan
- Nick Harding, Gausellmann
- Niamh McDade, RSPH
- Helen Garratt GamCare
- Leslie Mcloed-Miller, LLM
- John Terroni, Electrocoin
- Sophie Dean, GVC
- Ben Clubbs, Cauldron Gambling with Lives
- Charles Ritchie, Gambling with Lives
- Luke Griggs, Headway
- Holly Johal, Hanover
- George Sinnott, Gambling Commission
- Eleanor Curry, DCMS
- Tom Witherow, Daily Mail
- Neil McAvoy, Atlas Partners
- John White, BACTA
- Gabi Stergides, BACTA
- James Miller, BACTA