



Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Please reply to: Councillor Julien Parrott,
For Ellacombe Ward,
51 Princes Road,
Torquay
TQ1 1NW

My ref:

Your ref:

Telephone: 01803 293217

E-mail: Julien.parrott@torbay.gov.uk

Website: www.torbay.gov.uk

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Dear Cllr Thomas

Fixed Odds Betting Terminals

In accordance with Standing Order D13 I would like to request that the proliferation of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals in Torbay be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBT) are new touch-screen roulette and gaming machines which can accept stakes of up to £100 every 20 seconds. The machines do not take cash. Instead, the customer provides cash or their credit/debit cards at the counter and the cashier credits the machine of choice remotely. In this way, the customer is not putting hard cash into the machine in the same way that in a casino a gambler hands over cash for plastic chips. This is an important psychological step whereby the direct link between gambling and cash is broken. For example, the customer can have the FOBT machine credited with £100 and then set the machine to whatever game he/she chooses and at whatever stake level he/she decides.

According to research released last month by the Campaign for Fairer Gambling, the Gambling Act 2005 restricts each betting shop to a maximum of four such machines. However, this just means that the profitability of the machines causes the bookmakers to open more and more shops to increase the number of machines in poorer areas (where most of the profits come from).

The Campaign for Fairer Gambling has done detailed research based on parliamentary constituencies (each MP being responsible for the representation of roughly the same number of constituents) (all figures are rounded):

Beckenham (Kent) £76,000,000 per annum

Great Yarmouth (Norfolk) £68,000,000 per annum

Woking (Surrey) £64,000,000 per annum

Torbay £97,000,000 per annum

And comparing Torbay directly with Exeter (one MP, annual spend £70m) and Plymouth (three MPs, annual spend £91m), the picture looks equally as grim.

So, in Torbay (or, rather, Torquay and Paignton as this is the area covered by the local MP), our residents spend almost one hundred million pounds each year on gambling on FOBT machines alone. Meanwhile, rent and utilities are being paid by credit card; payday and similar loans proliferate and children are leaving for school without any breakfast. In our Bay, there is a financial atom bomb waiting to detonate.

I would appreciate the Overview and Scrutiny Board considering:

- The detailed breakdown of the research from the Campaign for Fairer Gambling
- The impact of this type of gambling on children (especially those already in poverty and those on the edge of poverty)
- The Council's Licensing Policy and whether amendments can be made (within the constraints of the law) to limit the proliferation of these machines and the promotions aimed at encouraging people to use them
- Any possible links between increased level of violence/anti social behaviour and increased spend on gambling

Yours sincerely

Councillor Julien Parrott