

Gambling Harms Prevention

Summary of Report

This report outlines the steps the Council, through Public Health, have taken and intend to take to address gambling harm in Torbay.

Recommendations

- That the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board endorse Public Health activity in terms of gambling harm prevention in Torbay.
- Public Health welcome input from the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board on additional ideas for progression.

Background and Context

What is gambling related harm?

According to the *UK Gambling Commission*, gambling-related harm refers to the negative consequences that gambling can have on people who gamble and on others affected by their gambling. The Commission focuses on understanding when gambling becomes harmful, including situations where gambling leads to adverse impacts on a person's finances, relationships, health, wellbeing, work, or education.

Examples of gambling-related harm include:

- Financial difficulties or debt
- Relationship and family problems
- Emotional distress, anxiety, or depression
- Reduced performance at work or education
- Social isolation
- In severe cases, links to suicidal thoughts or suicide-related harms

Some groups of people are at more risk of gambling-related harm than general population. Key at-risk groups or behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Men
- Those aged 16-44
- Young people
- Unemployed and those under constrained economic circumstances.
- Those residing in areas of deprivation.
- Those experiencing homelessness.
- Those experiencing mental ill health.
- Those experiencing substance abuse/misuse.

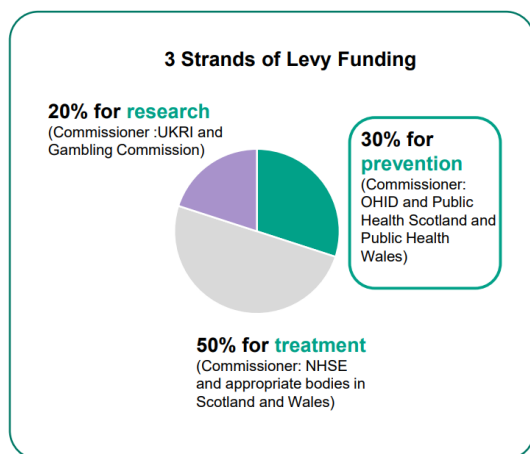
What is the role of local authorities?

Under the national statutory gambling levy (in place since April 2025), local authorities are now funded, mandated partners in gambling-harm prevention. They are expected to lead local prevention systems, co-ordinate partnership activity, and use levy funding to reduce gambling related harm in their areas.

It is important to note that the responsibility of local authorities does not include online gambling – prevention work here falls within the remit of Central Government, supported by the UK Gambling Commission.

Torbay Council has received an allocation of **£32,035** to spend on gambling harm prevention activity in 2025/26. Further funding has been guaranteed for 2026/27. Although not confirmed by Central Government, it is anticipated that levy funding will continue beyond this initial two-year period - addressing gambling harm established as a Government priority.

Figure 1. below outlines the split in national split in gambling levy funding.



The first two years of gambling related harm activity (2025-27) have a strong focus on building capacity and capability, as well as capturing the impact of harmful gambling activity at local authority level. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have assisted in local forward planning by producing a *Menu of Interventions* for local authorities to consider that combine a strong evidence base with encouragement to innovate.

Understanding the impact of harmful gambling activity

Public Health have completed a Devon wide **Health Needs Assessment** (covering the Torbay, Devon and Plymouth local authority areas) to understand the extent of gambling harm in Torbay.

National summary points:

- For each of person engaging in harmful gambling activity, it is estimated there are **six-ten affected others (family members & friends)** also experiencing gambling-related harms.
- **Financial harm:** Losses, debt, rent arrears, and reduced ability to meet basic needs. Coastal areas show concentrated harm hotspots.

- **Crime and safety harm:** Theft, fraud, and acquisitive crime linked to financial desperation. Coastal towns with dense gambling venues show elevated harm clusters.
- **Community-level harm:** Concentration of landed premises - such as betting shops, Adult Gaming Centres (AGC) and bingo halls) can create harm hotspots, reduce high-street resilience, and increase visible deprivation. Coastal areas are specifically identified as higher-risk environments.
- **Mental-health harm:** Anxiety, depression, suicidality, and stress linked to continuous-play machines and frequent visits. National evidence reviews identify mental-health deterioration as a core harm category.
- **Inequality-driven harm:** Landed premises, and especially AGC's often cluster in more deprived coastal neighbourhoods, amplifying existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities.
- **Work and productivity harm:** Reduced concentration, absenteeism, and job instability due to time spent gambling or stress from losses. Identified in national harms frameworks.
- **Physical-health harm:** Sleep disruption, stress-related symptoms, and neglect of health needs.
- **Relationship harm:** Conflict, breakdown, loss of trust, and domestic strain. The Gambling Survey for Great Britain highlights relationship discord as a common adverse consequence.
- **Youth exposure harm:** Youth exposure to gambling refers to the ways children and young people see, learn about, or become familiar with gambling long before they legally participate, which increases the likelihood of future harm. It's one of the most important early-risk factors identified in UK evidence reviews. This can happen through:
 - **Visibility of gambling venues:** High-street AGC's, betting shops, and arcades in places young people regularly pass.
 - **Advertising and marketing:** TV, social media, sports sponsorship, influencer content, and online adverts.
 - **Family and peer behaviour:** Seeing parents, siblings, or friends gamble, talk about wins, or treat gambling as normal.
 - **Digital exposure:** Loot boxes, social-casino games, and gambling-like mechanics in video games.
 - **Tourist-area clustering:** In coastal areas like Torbay, gambling venues are often concentrated in areas young people walk through daily.
- **Gambling harms cost** at least £1.27 billion from 2019 to 2020 in England alone. This analysis includes the first estimate of the economic cost of suicide (£619.2 million) and provides an updated cost of homelessness associated with harmful gambling (£62.8 million).
- **12.6%** of people who gambled in the preceding 12 months experienced suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide, with 7.7% experiencing these harms as a result of their gambling.
- **The Marmot Review** 'Ten Years On' identified a higher concentration of gambling premises on high streets as a sign of an "unhealthy high street" - widening inequalities for the most vulnerable and leading to poor mental and physical health.

Torbay summary points

- Torbay has **44** landed premises (such as betting shops, Adult Gaming Centres (AGC) and bingo halls) licensed for gambling - approximately 27.2 gambling premises per 100,000 population. This figure is significantly higher than the England average of 12.9 and is one of the highest proliferations of gambling premises in England. Source: Gambling Commission, 2026.
- **53%** of adults (18+) are estimated to have spent money on gambling in the **past 4 weeks** (worse than the England value), falling to 28.68% when the National Lottery is excluded, though participation in gambling activity is higher in Torbay, both with and without the National Lottery, than both the Southwest and England values
- The **Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI)** measures how harmful an individual's gambling behaviour is, the frequency of gambling and behaviours such as chasing losses and experiencing a loss of control. It covers nine items with a rating scale of answers. A PGSI score of:
 - **1 to 2:** those experiencing low levels of harm
 - **3 to 7:** those experiencing moderate levels of harm
 - **8 and over:** those experiencing severe adverse levels of harm.
- 85.82% of Torbay's adult population have a PGSI score of 0, meaning the majority of the population experience low levels of harm. However, 3.24% are estimated to score 8+, meaning that they are likely to experience adverse consequences. This equates to approximately **3700** at any given time, with a further 6-10 others likely affected for each person. The PGSI scores for Torbay are largely similar to the England average, but Torbay has higher estimated numbers of those scoring 8+ than England and the Southwest.

Table 1. Cost of harm associated with gambling in Torbay

Cost of harm associated with gambling	Torbay	Great Britain
Health: General Medical Service Consultation (mental health)	£37,451	£22,870,771
Health: Hospital Inpatient	£774,497	£472,980,254
Crime: Crime Committed (police call out)	£55,482	£33,882,624
Crime: Court Appearance	£15,604	£9,529,488
Housing: Homelessness Support	£28,608	£17,470,728
Welfare: Universal Credit	£1,387,576	£847,383,250
Fiscal cost (£ millions)	£2,299,218	£1,480,000,000

Progress to date

There has been significant progress this year:

- **Joint Peninsula Agreement.** Cornwall, Devon and Torbay local authorities (approach agreed by DHSC) have pooled their gambling levy allocations to fund peninsula level interventions. This greatly increases the amount of available budget for the next two years to approximately £154K per annum. In line with DHSC direction, budget can be used to fund supporting posts as well as commissioned activity
- **Peninsula Recruitment.** Torbay Council has led on the recruitment of two posts, both of which will be hosted by Torbay Council, but will operate on a Peninsula footprint. QA new Public Health Specialist and Intelligence Analyst will be starting on a two-year fixed term basis on the 26 October this year.
- **Peninsula Gambling Harm Action Plan.** Leaning on the DHSC Menu of Interventions, a draft action plan has been created that supports the equitable approach central to the Joint Peninsula agreement. It is anticipated that several components will be delivered internally to the three local authorities, using the capacity of the two new posts. Some further components will be covered through uptake of VCSE activity in the Peninsula funded by the gambling levy, while some, not covered by either approach above, will require commissioning. List not exhaustive.
 - **Mapping of treatment referral pathways** as well as eligibility.
 - **Development of a toolkit** for frontline services including local authority teams, NHS, commercial and VCSE partners. Covering how to ask the question regarding harmful gambling, what to ask and referral options/methods.
 - **Training for frontline services regarding the application of the toolkit.**
 - **Gambling Harm Interventions for educational settings.**
 - **Gambling Harm Promotional Campaigns.**
 - **Guidance for Licensing and Planning Teams.** To include information on landed premises applications, further options within licensing controls (for example spot checks) and the latest/upcoming planning controls, such as cumulative impact assessments and the use of planning permissions.
 - **Restriction on gambling advertising on local authority estate**
- **Identification of VCSE delivery** across the Peninsula – not only those funded under the gambling levy 26-27 but also those not funded but able to deliver against the draft Peninsula Action Plan.
- **Identification of current treatment referral pathways** – At present there are two options for the Peninsula – ARA Recovery for All (VCSE levy funded) and the NHS Southwest Treatment and Recovery Service (Southampton). Both take external and self-referrals and have options for this engaged in harmful

gambling and affected others. Capacity within the latter will be increased by levy funding to cater for increased demand across the Southwest.

- **Local governance arrangements** – Gambling harm prevention is now included as a topic area for the *Turning the Tide on Poverty* Strategic Group. An initial paper was presented in May. A further update will be scheduled for later in the year. A supporting operational group led by Public Health has also been formed, including Community Safety, Licensing and Planning.
- **Coalition to End Gambling Advertising (CEGA)**, is a national charity founded to restrict the amount of gambling advertising in the UK. Membership includes the RSPH, ADPH and the Faculty of Public Health. Alongside Devon, Cornwall and over 20 other local authorities, Torbay has joined the organisation.
- **World Cup Gambling Harm Prevention Campaign** – Over the course of the Football World Cup in June and July, Torbay, alongside Cornwall, Devon and Plymouth local authorities signed up to this DHSC recommended national campaign delivered by CAN-Digital. The campaign included promotion via social media platforms, treatment pathways, text alerts and opt-in emails. Local authority level dashboards detailing uptake and performance have just been released – evaluation required. Costs were met through gambling levy allocations.
- **Torbay level data sets on gambling activity**, including the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) have now been released and will form our benchmark going forward.
- **Adult Gaming Centre (AGC) application/objection** – Torbay Road, Paignton. An AGC application was submitted to Licensing earlier in the year. Public Health, Licencing, Community Safety and Planning all agreed that we should jointly object to the application. An evidence/objection paper was submitted by Public Health outlining the risks posed by another AGC in Torbay, specifically in Roundham with Hyde, focusing on vulnerable groups, inequality and youth exposure. The objections were upheld at Licensing Committee in August and the license refused. This is the first time an AGC application has been heard and refused in Torbay. It is very likely that the applicant will appeal and next step will be Magistrates Court hearing later in the year.

Next steps

- **Health Needs Assessment Phase 2** – This will fall under the remit of the 2 new posts and will include local authority small area level maps from DHSC, updated small area data, NHS treatment numbers and local area level insights
- **Gambling Harm UK (GHUK) System Support Programme** – engage with levy funded VCSE provider over the two years of the funding to assess the

Torbay system and aid future delivery, with inference for the two other local authorities forming the Peninsula Agreement.

- **DHSC reporting on spend and activity (in year and planned)** – Via online portal. Mandatory requirement. Will also inform any potential carry forward of levy allocation.
- **Action Plan** – Confirm content in time for new posts starting & deliver until end of levy funding in Autumn 2028.
- **Peninsula Learning Network** – establish network.

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