

## **Statement: CS16.01**

**Cabinet – 2 November 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 16 - Gambling Act Policy Review (Statutory)**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Barry Parsons**

The last bank on Stapleton Road closed about five years ago. It's now a betting shop; one of four in my ward of Easton alone. Instead of financial services for our diverse, deprived community, we now have a venue that exploits some of our most vulnerable citizens. There's symbolism there.

I welcome the publication of the new Gambling Policy. It is good as far as it goes. But we have a long way to travel before we can claim to be addressing gambling as a city and a society.

There is increasing consensus that gambling is a public health issue. As such, we need a harm reduction approach to gambling across the whole population, not just the small subset of "problem gamblers" currently targeted by policy.

Public Health England recently published a landmark report on the harms associated with gambling, which it estimated at over £1.2 billion a year in England. This is likely to be a significant underestimate. Harms associated with gambling include homelessness, suicide, depression, alcohol dependence, illicit drug use, impacts on employment and education, and crime. And the burden falls most heavily on deprived communities.

The three licensing objectives which inform how we license gambling cover crime, fairness and the protection of children and other vulnerable persons. So the broader public health impacts listed above are not considered. This is not a failure of Bristol City Council policy so much as of the national approach to licensing and regulating gambling.

Betting shops tend to concentrate in areas of high deprivation, and the obvious inference is that such venues tend to exploit vulnerable populations. There are four betting shops in my ward of Easton, the highest total outside the city centre. It can be no coincidence that a bank offering financial services for this deprived community have been replaced by an industry that exploits the vulnerable. That venue is now a focus for crime and antisocial behaviour, and the economic power and wellbeing of disadvantaged residents is impaired.

Compare this document to the recently published and excellent Drug and Alcohol Strategy for Bristol, and you get a sense of what needs to be done. A clear vision of how the problem impacts all of us and a commitment to reducing harm. Supporting communities, changing cultures; working towards prevention and early intervention; minimising harm and protecting health; offering services for treatment and recovery; tackling crime and disorder; and adapting to emerging challenges. That's the vision we need for gambling.