

Gambling

Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

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1 Introduction

1.1 The General Assembly of 2007 received an extensive report on gambling. This report gave a broad view of the growth of gambling in recent years and the Gambling Act 2005. The Council recognised that the new Gambling Act was perceived to be part of a change in attitudes to gambling in society at large. In receiving the Report the Assembly called on the Church to “actively oppose the growth in the gambling culture in our country”.

1.2 The 2007 Report outlined a theological framework for the consideration of gambling based on ideas of stewardship. It stressed the Christian duty to protect the vulnerable, noting particularly the effect of gambling on the poor and the distortion of values which gambling promotes. It is not intended that these themes be revisited for this report but they are taken to underpin our ongoing work.

2 Developments since 2007 Report

2.1 The last year has seen some significant changes in the political landscape around gambling. Following the change of Prime Minister it has been notable that the place of gambling has changed. The decision to locate the Regional or “Super” casino in Manchester was announced in February 2006. The House of Lords rejected the plan in March but Tony Blair told MPs that he supported the development of 2 casinos – in Manchester and Blackpool.¹ After he became Prime Minister Gordon Brown signalled a change of heart with the emphasis moving away from casinos as a tool for regeneration and the regional casino will now not be built.²

2.2 The original awarding of the regional casino to Manchester meant that it would not be going to Glasgow. One effect of that decision has been that the partner that had expected to benefit from economies of scale by having a casino in Glasgow was left with only the possibilities of a casino in Stranraer. Dumfries and Galloway Council has the right to award the licence. (This was confirmed in the announcement cancelling the regional casino in Manchester.) However, it is still far from certain that the casino in Stranraer will actually be built.

2.3 One of the effects of the Gambling Act 2005 was to require all Local Authorities to produce a Licensing Policy and that this must be renewed every three years.³ These are required of all authorities whether they have an operating casino within their geographical area or not. This is an area where Presbyteries can and should be involved. The recent joint publication of The Salvation Army and The Methodist Church, *Against the Odds...?*, outlines several ways in which people can be involved at the local level.⁴

3 British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007⁵

3.1 The 2007 Report noted (§4.6.3) that the British Prevalence Study 2000 figures were well out of date. The British Gambling Survey 2007 has since been issued by the National Centre for Social Research. It provides a snapshot of British gambling behaviour prior to the implementation of the Gambling Act 2005 and thus will provide a benchmark against which the effects of that Act can be measured. The BBC Summary of the Report⁶ is as follows:

HEADLINES:

- There are about 250,000 "problem gamblers" in the UK - but the numbers have remained steady since the last survey in 1999.
- When people whose sole form of gambling is playing the National Lottery are included, the amount of people gambling has dropped from 72% to 68%.
- When they are excluded, participation in gambling in the past year had risen from 46% to 48% - which, if translated across the UK - would amount to about an extra 1m people.

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6638927.stm 9 May 2007

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7264143.stm 26 February 2008

³ Gambling Act 2005 §349

⁴ *Against the Odds...?*, Methodist Church and Salvation Army; 2007; 23-24.

⁵ British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007; Heather Wardle, Kerry Sproston, Jim Orford, Bob Erens, Mark Griffiths, Rebecca Constantine and Sarah Pigott; National Centre for Social Research; 2007

⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7002542.stm 19 September 2007

- The types of gambling with the most "problem gamblers" are the newest forms of gambling, such as spread betting, fixed odds betting terminals, betting exchanges and online gambling.

PARTICIPATION IN GAMBLING:

- 68% of the adult population took part in some form of gambling in the past year
- The most popular form was the National Lottery draw - 57% of people interviewed had taken part
- Participation in the football pools dropped from 9% in 1999 to 3% in 2007
- Numbers of people doing the National Lottery and buying scratch cards also dropped
- Overall 6% of people questioned used the internet to gamble online.
- Men are more likely to gamble than women - 71% compared to 65%

PROBLEM GAMBLING:

- Rates of problem gambling were 0.6% and 0.5% of the gambling population according to two different measures used
- But excluding those who only did the National Lottery, between 1.2% and 1.3% of people who had gambled in the past year were estimated to be problem gamblers
- Problem gamblers are most likely to be male, single, in poor health and have a parent with a gambling problem
- Problem gambling is also "significantly associated" with being black or Asian, separated or divorced, having fewer educational qualifications and being under 55 years old
- Spread betting had the highest number of problem gamblers - 14.7%, followed by fixed odds betting terminals (11.2%) and betting exchanges (9.8%)
- Problem gambling in Britain appears to be worse than in Norway, similar to that in Canada, New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland and lower than that in the US, Australia, South Africa, Singapore and Hong Kong

ATTITUDES TO GAMBLING:

- Attitudes towards gambling are more negative than positive
- The average view was that gambling was more harmful than beneficial and should not be encouraged
- But the average person did not think there should be a ban on gambling
- The under 35s, heavy drinkers and problem gamblers were most likely to be in favour of gambling
- The over 55s, widows and widowers, people describing themselves as Asian or Asian British and people who had a problem gambler in the family were most opposed to gambling

3.2 The Council issued a press release welcoming the research but cautioned that it should not be seen as a green light for further expansion in the opportunities to gamble. It is important to recognise the main overall conclusion that the Study draws: "British public attitudes towards gambling are, in general, more negative than positive... While the average person was inclined towards believing that people have a right to gamble whenever they want, and towards rejecting a total prohibition on gambling, most believed that gambling was more harmful than beneficial for individuals (for example 'a fool's game' and 'dangerous for family life' and not something that 'liven up life' nor 'a harmless form of entertainment'); and was more harmful than beneficial for society (e.g. 'too many opportunities for gambling nowadays' and not 'good for communities' nor 'an important part of cultural life')." ⁷ We are encouraged that the research supports a similar approach to that of the General Assembly.

3.3 The Survey promises that a further Survey will be conducted in 2009/2010 "to measure the impact of the Act has on gambling behaviour and attitudes."⁸ It is important that this Survey is conducted according to that timescale. The gap from the last Survey was too long and the changes that are occurring are significant. The Council will press for the Survey to be conducted on time and urges HMG and the Gambling Commission to act to ensure that this is the case.

4 Against the Odds...?

4.1 The Methodist Church and The Salvation Army produced *Against the Odds...?* in 2007. This valuable publication provides information about the Gambling Act of 2005 and problem gambling. The producing Churches were generous in allowing others to become associated with their work and we were delighted to support it, offering our imprimatur. The document is available from the Church and Society pages of the Church of Scotland website.⁹

⁷ British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007; 117

⁸ British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007; Foreword

⁹ <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/councils/churchsociety/downloads/csagainsttheodds.pdf>

4.2 *Against the Odds...?* offers a clear guide to the recent changes in gambling as well as providing a very useful guide to the most common forms of gambling. We commend it to churches and presbyteries for study.

4.3 *Against the Odds...?* highlights a number of points of concern. Internet and other new forms of Gambling were addressed in the 2007 Assembly Report (§ 4.2) with particular concern being expressed as to their attractiveness for problem gamblers. The British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007 has provided statistical evidence for such concerns. In looking at the distribution of problem gambling by gambling activity the Survey reported “Among those who had gambled in the past year, problem gambling prevalence ranged from 1.0% for the National Lottery Draw to 14.7% for spread betting. The next highest prevalence was 11.2% for fixed odds betting terminals, followed by betting exchanges (9.8%), online gambling (7.4%) and online betting (6.0%). Interestingly, those activities with the highest prevalences are ‘newer’ forms of gambling activities that have emerged since 1999.”¹⁰ *Against the Odds...?* includes reference to the Royal College of Psychiatrists Report that highlights the extreme dangers that it sees in remote gambling as they term it. Indeed they state that “Overriding attention needs to be given to ensuring that the regulation of remote gambling is consistent with the licensing objective set by section 1 of the Gambling Act 2005 that there should be adequate protection from harm and exploitation from gambling. NO deregulation in relation to ANY aspect of ANY other type of gambling should be implemented before this has been demonstrated to be so.”¹¹ This echoes many of the concerns that we raised last year. We would reiterate their and our concerns that Internet or remote gambling be closely regulated as a matter of priority.

4.4 *Against the Odds...?* reflects the Churches ongoing concerns about the advertising of gambling (see 2007 Deliverance 48). This has been permitted since September 2007. The Churches were one, among many voices¹², who argued that this liberalisation should not have been permitted until the other effects of the Gambling Act 2005 were known. The change in advertising regulation has had a noticeable effect particularly in the world of sport. This is a major area of growth in gambling (see 2007 Report § 4.4). The effects are not just seen in advertising on TV during breaks in events but also in the sponsorship of those TV programmes, around the ground and football matches and in the sponsorship of events. These are all designed to speed the perception of gambling as a normal activity – a trend that we refute. This is an area where individual Church members can be vigilant. *Against the Odds...?* contains clear advice as to how individuals can respond to adverts and other activities that they perceive to be inappropriate and this should particularly include the targeting of the vulnerable and children.

4.5 *Against the Odds...?* contains a particularly valuable section What can you do? This outlines responses for the individual, the education system, with relation to the licensing system and advertising, local treatment services, counselling, political action and commends prayer to support those involved in or harmed by the gambling industry. This is a comprehensive section that gives practical action for all levels and we commend it to individual church members, congregations and presbyteries.

5 Further concerns for the General Assembly

5.1 The Deliverances of the 2007 Assembly drew the Church’s attention to several further matters that the Group has pursued during the year.

5.2 Deliverance 54 highlighted the importance of education, both in schools and elsewhere, thus expressing specific concern for the effect of gambling on young people. During the year the group has met with Tacade, a charity that focuses on gambling and other forms of social education. We have looked at two resources that they have produced. *You Bet!* is designed for formal education contexts while *Just Another Game?* is aimed at informal settings and might be ideal for work in youth groups. These resources can help young people to understand some of the issues around gambling. The resources also work to develop generic and

¹⁰ British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007; 94

¹¹ *The Royal College of Psychiatrists Submission to the Secretary for Culture Media & Sport on the implementation of the Gambling Act 2005*; 1

¹² eg “*The Royal College of Psychiatrists advises that the proposals for the deregulation of advertising gambling are inconsistent with the licensing objective set by section 1 of the Gambling Act 2005 that there should be protection from harm and exploitation from gambling.*” *The Royal College of Psychiatrists Submission to the Secretary for Culture Media & Sport on the implementation of the Gambling Act 2005*; 8

transferable skills. In our examination of the resources we recognised that they are not anti gambling but based on informed choice. The model used is the ASK approach – attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding. We raised with Martin Buczkiewicz, the Chief Executive of Tacade, the place of abstinence as one approach to gambling and he agreed to look further into its place within the resources. We commend these resources to congregations, presbyteries and schools who wish to work with young people in this area. They are available from Tacade at www.tacade.com

5.3 The 2007 Report (§4.6.6) expressed particular concern about the effect of gambling on young people and the greater incidence of problem gambling among young people in Scotland when compared to the rest of the UK.¹³ The Prevalence Survey does not break down by region but we have no reason to believe that the greater problems experienced in Scotland will have changed. The amount of research in this area is still small and we look forward to more appearing.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The Council notes that at the time of writing the situation about the future development of gambling within the UK remains unclear as the result of political inactivity. We welcome the fact that the planned increases in gambling have been halted, at least temporarily. We remain convinced that gambling does not offer a positive way forward for society and should not be used as a tool of regeneration. We are encouraged that the Gambling Prevalence Survey shows that the general reaction of the public to gambling is negative and urge HMG and Local Authorities to take cognisance of that fact.

6.2 The Council remains particularly concerned about the newer forms of gambling and their impact on young people in particular. We echo the clarion call issued by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and urge HMG to commit itself not only to halt any increase in gambling opportunities until the effects of the Gambling Act (2005) have been assessed but also to increase regulation in internet and remote gambling as a matter of priority.

6.3 The Council feels that it is important that the Church and Society Council continues to monitor this area closely up to and beyond the publication of the next Prevalence Survey when the impact of the Gambling Act (2005) will be assessable.

¹³ Prevalence and correlates of youth gambling in Scotland; Moodie, Crawford, Finnigan, Frances; [Addiction Research and Theory](#), Volume 14, Number 4, August 2006, 365-385