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**Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP**  
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025**

Dear Lisa Nandy MP,

**Re: Urgent need for gambling reform to address community harms**

Following Brent Council's initial correspondence with your Department in Autumn 2024, we are writing today as a coalition of local councils, representing almost 12 million people, to outline practical steps for necessary reform to the Gambling Act 2005, which is now desperately out of date and stripping power away from the health of our local communities and high streets.

Gambling harms is a growing issue across the country. As demonstrated by our breadth of signatories, and by the APPG on Gambling Reform's endorsement of our 6 Point Plan for Change (see below), councils and constituencies of all political stripes are now bearing the social and fiscal consequences of outdated legislation. From documented increases in crime and anti-social behaviour, to an enormous £1.77bn annual pressure on the NHS, tackling gambling-related harms has all too quickly become a problem that threatens the fabric of local government.

Communities like Brent are experiencing a groundswell of land-based gambling operators, spreading along our high streets and seemingly targeting areas of higher deprivation in a bid to maximise profits. The alarming concentration of these premises is often met with strong community opposition, and concerns from public health and community safety officials.

But, despite this shared opposition amongst residents, police, and politicians, councils have found themselves effectively powerless to intervene. The current statutory 'Aim to Permit' duty severely limits a council's ability to prevent the opening of additional gambling venues, even when the community is unequivocally against it. This has left local authorities and their communities grappling with outdated and inadequate legislation that fails to protect vulnerable residents from the harms associated with gambling. Last year's landmark case from Sheffield City Council shows that councils, hand-in-hand with their communities, are now taking a decisive stance against the spread of gambling premises. But when every refusal we mount is another costly drawn out legal challenge, we need to be empowered to uphold our values with ease.

We welcome the Prime Minister's aspiration that communities should be empowered to take back control over their destinies; as well as the English Devolution White Paper's pledge to a rebalancing of power from central government, so that local leaders can take back control. We

believe that reforming the 'Aim to Permit' can be a key pillar of the government's plans for devolution. We look forward to working with you and your officials on the commitments set out in the White Paper, as you look to strengthen the tools available to councils to refuse licenses.

The harmful consequences of gambling are well-documented and have been linked to a range of social and public health issues, including suicidality, depression, anxiety, and financial ruin. Research has demonstrated that these social and public health issues are often exacerbated in areas with high numbers of gambling premises. In addition to these social and public health issues, a study by Ealing Council outlined the increase in crime and disorder associated with the saturation of gambling premises, contributing to a visible deterioration of our high streets:

***“As well as reported crime in betting premises being much higher than the controls, there was a clear and statistically significant increase in crime in the vicinity of betting shops, with the greatest correlations at the closest distances from the premises.”***

We were encouraged by the commitment in Labour's Manifesto on gambling reform, and look forward to building on the positive start we've made with the Government to reform the much-outdated Gambling Act 2005. **We therefore ask the government to consider supporting the following six reforms, as a matter of urgency for the health of local communities:**

- 1. Reform the 'Aim to Permit' Policy:** Grant local authorities the power to reject premise license applications that threaten the community's welfare and safety.
- 2. Categorisation of Premises:** Ensure that the incoming National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places Bingo Halls and Adult Gaming Centres in the same planning category as bookmakers, so they cannot bypass caps by splitting premises.
- 3. Planning Applications:** Allow councils to consider local household debt levels when evaluating planning applications for high street casinos, to prevent the proliferation of gambling dens in close proximity to schools, in the same way councils can limit junk food establishments in these areas.
- 4. Statutory Levy for Gambling Harm Prevention:** Administer the statutory levy on gambling operators for research, education, and treatment through an independent public body, further devolving funding to local health authorities.
- 5. Overhaul of Gambling Advertising:** Prohibit gambling advertising, promotion, and sponsorship to prevent exposure, especially to children and young people.
- 6. Stop Progress on Proposals to Liberalise Adult Gaming Centres:** Follow the recommendations of the Gambling Survey for Great Britain, which underlines the need for a review of spin speed and excess staking levels on harmful B3 machines.

The communities we serve are experiencing these detrimental impacts, owing to the proliferation of gambling venues. To be clear, we are not calling for an outright ban on gambling in any form; but instead, we are offering our collective support for much-needed reform of the legislation for the modern age. We look forward to discussing our shared challenges and recommendations with you and your officials. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how we can work together to build healthier communities and safer high streets.

Yours sincerely, the undersigned:



**Cllr Muhammed Butt**



**Cllr Mili Patel**

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<sup>1</sup> [Ealing Council - Study of Crime and Betting Shops — MAKE Associates](#)

**Signatories:**

1. Cllr Dominic Twomey, Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council
2. Cllr Barry Rawlings, Leader of Barnet Council
3. Cllr Gavin Callaghan, Leader of Basildon Borough Council
4. Cllr Lynn Williams, Leader of Blackpool Council
5. Cllr Scott Patient, Deputy Leader of Calderdale Council
6. Cllr Richard Olszewski, Leader of Camden Council
7. Cllr Stephen Holt, Leader of Eastbourne Borough Council
8. Cllr Caroline Topping, Leader of East Suffolk Council
9. Cllr Ergin Erbil, Leader of Enfield Council
10. Cllr Susan Aitken, Leader of Glasgow Council
11. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
12. Cllr Anthony Okereke, Leader of Greenwich Council
13. Cllr Stephen Cowan, Leader of Hammersmith and Fulham Council
14. Cllr Peray Ahmet, Leader of Haringey Council
15. Cllr Ray Morgon, Leader of Havering Council
16. Cllr Shantanu Rajawat, Leader of Hounslow Council
17. Cllr Una O'Halloran, Leader of Islington Council
18. Cllr Claire Holland, Leader of Lambeth Council
19. Cllr Caroline Jackson, Leader of Lancaster City Council
20. Brenda Dacres, Mayor of the London Borough of Lewisham
21. Cllr Ross Garrod, Leader of Merton Council
22. Chris Cooke, Mayor of Middlesbrough
23. Cllr Andrew Mellen, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council
24. Cllr Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, Leader of Newham Council
25. Cllr Dennis Jones, Leader of Peterborough City Council
26. Cllr Matthew Brown, Leader of Preston City Council
27. Cllr Kam Rai, Leader of Redbridge Council
28. Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
29. Cllr Robert King, Cllr Linda Gillham, Cllr Don Whyte and Cllr Steve Ringham, Co-Leaders of Runnymede Borough Council/Cllr Carl Mann, Group Leader of Independent Group and Cllr Peter Snow, Group Leader of Conservative Group
30. Cllr Lorna Fielker, Leader of Southampton City Council
31. Cllr Joanne Sexton, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council
32. Cllr Robert Cook, Leader of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
33. Cllr Shaun Macdonald, Leader of Surrey Heath Borough Council

34. Cllr Petrina Lees, Leader of Uttlesford Council
35. Cllr Grace Williams, Leader of Waltham Forest Council
36. Cllr Adam Hug, Leader of Westminster Council
37. Cllr Adam Brown, Leader of West Northamptonshire Council
38. Matt Zarb-Cousin, Director of Clean Up Gambling
39. Will Prochaska, Director of Coalition to End Gambling Ads

**Copying to:**

Angela Rayner MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Deputy Prime Minister

Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Baroness Fiona Ruth Twycross, Minister for Gambling and Lords Minister

Ashley Dalton MP, DHSC Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Professor Chris Whitty, Permanent Secretary, Chief Medical Officer, and Expert adviser

Greg Fell, President of the Association of Directors of Public Health