Brent Gambling Harms Prevention Strategy

2026-2030

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Foreword

I am proud to introduce Brent's first Gambling Harms Prevention Strategy, which sets out our vision for a borough where fewer people experience harm from gambling, where people can access support early and without stigma, and where we work together to prevent harm before it happens.

The harm caused by gambling is a significant public health issue, and one that can too often remain hidden. Its impact can be devastating, affecting people's mental and physical health, financial security, relationships, employment and housing. The consequences can also reach far beyond the individual, affecting families, children and our wider communities.

We know that people in Brent are affected by gambling-related harm, and we are determined to do more. We have already taken a stand, calling on government to give councils greater powers to prevent the proliferation of gambling premises and better protect our high streets and communities. In July, councillors for all political groups unanimously passed a motion declaring a gambling harms emergency in Brent and committing to develop a Gambling Harms Strategy. This strategy delivers on that commitment, setting out how we will strengthen prevention, improve access to support and take stronger action to reduce gambling-related harm across Brent.

We cannot tackle this issue alone. We will work alongside residents, communities, the NHS, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations, and other partners to make sure people know where to turn for help and feel able to ask for it. We will work together to reduce inequalities, challenge stigma and make support easier to access.

Our ambition is simple: a Brent where people can enjoy their lives without experiencing gambling-related harm, where those who need help can get it early, and where no one affected by gambling feels they have to face it alone.



Councillor Liz Dixon

Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Health

Introduction

This is Brent's first Gambling Harms Prevention Strategy. The strategy provides the high-level framework for our approach to tackling gambling harms in Brent, setting out our vision and priorities. It sets out our commitment to adopting a public health approach to preventing and reducing gambling-related harm across the borough. It describes how we will work to reduce risk, intervene earlier and make the best use of the powers and resources available to us across the Council to improve outcomes.

We've already led national efforts to lobby the government to grant local authorities more control over the gambling establishments in their area. In 2025, the Leader of the Council wrote an open letter to the government. Signed by 39 other local authorities, mayors and campaign groups, the letter called for reform to the powers councils have to prevent the proliferation of gambling venues on our high streets. We have consistently raised the issue of gambling harm, creating and sustaining a national conversation about the challenges people are facing and the need for change. Brent's work contributed to the national debate about the powers available to councils to address the concentration and impact of gambling premises. In August 2026, the Government announced proposals to strengthen licensing and planning controls.

Alongside this work, we have begun to build a picture of gambling harms in Brent, including through a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and commissioning a report by the Social Market Foundation on the impact of Adult Gaming Centres.

This strategy builds on this strong foundation of leadership and sets out a clear programme of action for the coming years to both continue our role in driving change and create a more coordinated local approach to tackling the harm caused by gambling. It builds on the Council's commitments to take action on the proliferation of gambling premises in the borough and to adopt a preventative approach to tackling health inequalities.

We recognise that gambling harms are a complex, and often a taboo subject, meaning that many harms remain hidden. It is therefore essential that we change the narrative around the harms that gambling cause and shift blame away from individuals. Our ambition is for Brent to be a place where gambling-related harm is reduced and people have timely access to appropriate support, with Council services, partners and residents working collectively to support individuals without stigma.

This strategy covers four key priorities for addressing gambling harms in Brent:



We have developed this strategy using the best available evidence alongside the experiences of people who live and work in Brent. We have brought together findings from our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, engagement with residents, workshops with partners and staff, published research, guidance from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparity (OHID) and conversations with people who have lived experience of the harms of gambling. This has built a clear picture of gambling and gambling-related harm across the borough and gives us a strong case for change.

What are gambling-related harms?

Gambling is an activity which involves risking money or something of value on an uncertain event or outcome, with the hope of winning more. This includes gaming (for example slot machines, card games and casino games), betting, bingo and lotteries. The risk of harm varies according to the product, its design and accessibility, patterns of participation, marketing and the circumstances of the individual and community.

Gambling harm is the negative impact that gambling has on the mental, physical and financial health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society. Research shows that 2.7% of UK adults, around 1 in 37, experience problem gambling[i]. This means that they have experienced severe negative consequences as a result of gambling.

Research shows that the harms associated with gambling can be wide-ranging. **Gambling harms don't just affect the person who gambles**. They can impact their families, friends and wider society (known as 'affected others'). Affected others can experience the same types of harm at the same severity as those experienced by the individual who is gambling.

Types of harm include:

Health	Studies show that harms to health for an individual who gambles can include sleep problems, neglecting proper personal care, and experiencing emotions such as guilt, shame, loss of self-esteem and loneliness. Heavy gambling is associated with over 35% increased mortality rates[ii]. Deaths from suicide are significantly higher among adults with gambling disorder[iii].
Financial	This is the most direct form of harm experienced by gamblers and their affected others. Financial difficulties due to gambling can result in bankruptcy, relationship problems, mental health issues and homelessness[iv].
Relationships	It is estimated that, for every person who is directly affected by their own gambling, there is, on average, six more people indirectly affected[v]. Evidence shows that those engaging in problem gambling experience lower levels of family functioning, including arguments, relationship strain and domestic abuse.
Employment and education	Performance at work, school or university can be affected by gambling. Children of gamblers can experience difficulties at school due to a chaotic home life. Gambling has been shown to increase the risk of absenteeism, job turnover and withdrawal from education.
Crime	There is low to moderate evidence that links gambling with criminal activity. This data is extremely hard to quantify as the crime is often recorded for what it is, but rarely includes what motivated the crime. Crimes committed by gamblers often involve theft or fraud – usually as a way to pay off accumulated debts.[vi]

Gambling harms do not always present as an obvious or immediate problem. They can develop gradually, may be difficult to recognise and can remain hidden until they become more serious. Sometimes people are not aware themselves of how harmful their gambling has become until they are experiencing severe harm and even then, some people are unable to stop. Gambling is also not always the presenting cause of a person's difficulties. Someone may initially seek support for issues such as financial problems, debt, relationship difficulties, poor mental wellbeing or housing insecurity, with gambling only identified as an underlying or contributing factor later.

People more likely to be affected by gambling harms[vii]

Though gambling harms can affect anyone, they are most strongly experienced by men and those living in areas with higher levels of deprivation. Experiences of gambling harms often coexist alongside other difficulties like mental health issues and substance misuse.

Gender

Numerous studies have shown that men gamble at a higher rate than women. Research also shows that men are more likely to gamble as a habitual activity. However, while women are less likely to gamble than men, the gender gap is shrinking as the number of women who gamble, particularly online, is on the rise. Women with online gambling accounts were recently found to spend more time on each session than men. Nearly half of women who gamble say they do so in the hope of winning money to help with the cost of living. There are also differences in how men and women are targeted by gambling companies (men through sport and women through bingo for example) but always with the aim of getting people into high risk fast paced forms of gambling.

Ethnicity

Some research indicates differences in the prevalence and severity of gambling-related harm between ethnic groups. Some research shows that people from ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience gambling harm than white populations.

Deprivation

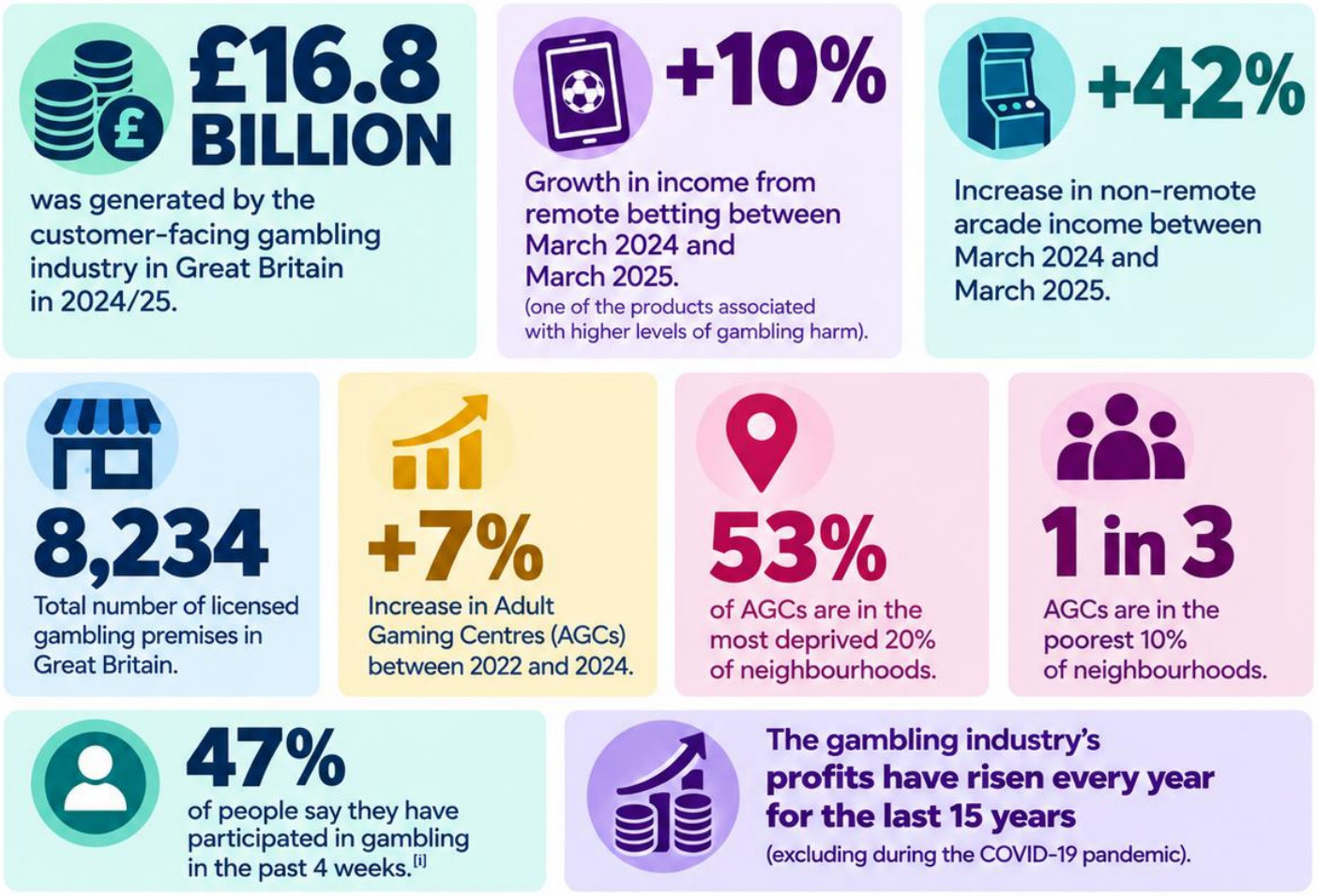
Studies have shown that many gambling premises are often located near potentially vulnerable populations in the most deprived areas. A 2020 report[viii] found that 21% of the UK's gambling premises were based within the most deprived decile in the country, while just 2% were in the least deprived decile. People living in the most deprived areas are more likely to gamble compared to those in the least deprived, and more likely to experience gambling problems. Their gambling activities also differ – those living in more deprived areas are more likely to gamble on faster-paced games such as scratch cards or slot machines, while those living in less deprived areas are more likely to bet on sport activities.

Age

Age is another factor associated with the likelihood of experiencing gambling harms. While participation in gambling is lowest amongst 16-24 year-olds, they are more than three times as likely to experience the most extreme levels of gambling-related harm.

Where we are now

The national picture[ix]



Regulation and licensing of gambling in the UK

Around 28% of gambling is done in-person rather than on digital platforms. The Gambling Act 2005 regulates gambling in Great Britain. Under the Act, local authorities are responsible for issuing licences for land-based gambling premises (including bookmakers, adult gaming centres and bingo halls). The Gambling Commission regulates commercial gambling at national level, while local licensing authorities exercise premises-licensing, compliance and enforcement functions under the Act.

Under the Gambling Act 2005, Brent Council is the licensing authority for gambling premises in the borough. In exercising its premises-licensing functions, the Council must apply the statutory licensing objectives, relevant Gambling Commission codes and guidance, and its published statement of principles. The current legislation requires licensing authorities to 'aim to permit' premises use where the statutory criteria are met. General public-health concerns or local opposition are not, by themselves, freestanding grounds for refusal, although robust local evidence may be relevant where it demonstrates a connection with the statutory licensing objectives, including protecting children and other vulnerable persons from harm or exploitation.

On 11 August 2026, the government announced its intention to revoke the statutory 'aim to permit' rule and proposed that Adult Gaming Centres should require planning permission. At the date of this strategy, the detail and timing of these measures remain subject to consultation, legislation and commencement arrangements. The Council will monitor developments and review its approach when the final legal framework is confirmed.

Gambling in Brent

What we already know[x]

Brent's demographic profile matches many of the risk groups most likely to gamble and/or experience harms from gambling. Brent has a younger than average population, high numbers of ethnically diverse communities, and is ranked the fourth most deprived borough in London; all of which are risk factors which could result in experiencing increased gambling harm. These characteristics may intersect with other social, economic and individual factors associated with gambling-related harm, but experiences and levels of risk are not uniform within or between communities.

Available estimates indicate that Brent may have comparatively high levels of gambling-related harm as measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), a screening tool used to assess gambling behaviour and associated risk in the general population. 17.1% of people in Brent are considered to be gambling with a low-level of risk (vs 13.4% in the rest of the country), while 6.2% are considered to be gambling with the highest level of risk (compared with 2.9%). The economic cost of gambling in Brent was estimated at £14.3 million in 2022 – a sevenfold rise from £2 million in 2012 – ranking it among the highest boroughs for fiscal gambling related-harm.

Brent has one of the highest numbers of gambling premises in London. In some wards, it is easier to find a place to gamble than a major supermarket. In 2025, Brent Council commissioned a report from the Social Market Foundation which explored the rise of Adult Gaming Centres and made recommendations on ways local authorities should be empowered to tackle gambling-related harm on our high streets. The report found that some professionals supporting vulnerable people in Brent believe that clusters of gambling venues in the borough have a detrimental impact on the community

In Brent, gambling premises tend to be clustered in more deprived areas, particularly around Harlesden, Kensal Green, Kilburn and Wembley Central, which all boast busy high streets and good transport links. In Harlesden, there are seven betting shops within 600m, and ten in a mile stretch in Willesden.

Our approach to change

The evidence is clear: stronger action is needed to prevent and reduce gambling-related harm in Brent.

Our ambition is to create a borough where fewer people experience gambling-related harm, support is available early and without stigma, and organisations work together to prevent harm before it occurs.

A public-health approach recognises that gambling carries differing levels of risk and that harm is shaped by the interaction between products, industry practices, availability, marketing, social and economic conditions and individual circumstances. Prevention should therefore include proportionate population-wide, targeted and individual interventions.

Brent recognises that gambling-related harm can arise from a complex interplay between gambling products, industry practices, government policy, local conditions, and individuals' circumstances and exposure, rather than from individual behaviour alone.

Our priorities



Our priorities for tackling gambling-related harms in Brent have been developed through engagement with partners, staff and peer workshops, data analysis, conversations with people who have lived experience and published research, and guidance from OHID. They set out our commitment to making Brent a place where people understand the risks associated with gambling and where those experiencing gambling harms get the right support, at the right time.

Detailed actions, responsibilities, timescales and measures supporting each priority will be set out in the action plan and reviewed through the Gambling Harms Partnership.

Priority 1: Raising awareness and driving change

We will raise awareness and understanding of gambling-related harm across Brent through communications and educational campaigns and support people affected by gambling harms through appropriate pathways. Alongside this, we will continue to advocate for stronger national legislation and local powers to reduce gambling-related harm in our communities. To achieve this, we will:

1. **Coordinate a borough-wide communications campaign** to increase awareness of gambling harms and the help available for both those gambling, and their affected others. Focused on Brent communities and targeted to specific groups where the data points to increased prevalence of gambling harm, we will work with our communities to raise awareness and understanding.
2. **Work with schools, colleges and youth services** to promote and provide sessions and resources which teach children how to understand and identify the risks and harms associated with gambling and what to do about it.
3. **Make clear our strong opposition to new gambling premises operating in Brent**, continuing our public affairs and communications activity to challenge the proliferation of gambling premises and highlight the harms gambling can cause to our communities.
4. **Continue to advocate for stronger powers for councils to tackle gambling harms**, including lobbying Government to deliver on its commitment to revoke the ‘Aim to Permit’ rule and to give councils greater powers to prevent the proliferation of gambling premises and challenge gambling providers.
5. **Take action on online gambling** where we can, including restricting access to online gambling sites when individuals are using council assets.

Priority 2: Embedding a data-led approach

Data will be at the centre of our approach to tackling gambling harms. We will build a robust local evidence base to guide decisions for future interventions and support. This will support proportionate, evidence-based interventions and strengthen the evidence available to the Council when exercising relevant planning, licensing, public-health and enforcement functions. To achieve this, we will:

1. **Conduct a comprehensive review of our existing data** and insight to better understand what data is currently available, where gaps exist and where additional data may be required.
2. **Explore opportunities to strengthen our data collection** on gambling-related harm in our existing assessment, referral and recording systems.
3. **Strengthen data sharing arrangements** between internal services, organisations engaged by the council to provide service and external partners to improve the availability of data and insight.
4. **Use data to map geographic hotspots of harm** within the borough, to help us to better target interventions, demonstrate where gambling premises cause harm and to strengthen the decisions we make when considering planning and licensing applications for gambling premises.
5. **Use strengthened evidence and insight** to inform decision-making, target interventions and evaluate impact, including establishing robust baselines of data on gambling in Brent and enhance refusals to gambling premise applications.

Note: Data collected or shared in connection with this strategy will be handled lawfully, fairly, transparently and proportionately. Wherever practicable, monitoring and evaluation will use anonymised or appropriately aggregated information. Appropriate privacy, information-sharing and data-protection arrangements, including Data Protection Impact Assessments where required, will be completed before relevant activity is implemented.

Priority 3: Regulation, planning and enforcement

To reduce the harms caused by gambling, we also need to reduce one of the causes – gambling premises. We will make robust, lawful and proportionate use of the Council's available planning, licensing and enforcement powers to address gambling-related risks and support safe, diverse and sustainable high streets. To achieve this we will:

1. **Review our planning policies**, with a particular focus on the ongoing review of the Brent Local Plan, which is a key mechanism to enable stronger powers to control the number and location of gambling venues.
2. **Review licensing policies** to maximise the powers we have to reduce the concentration of premises and take effective action against existing providers.
3. **Explore ways to improve how our planning policies and licensing policies work together** to strengthen our powers to refuse new gambling premises applications.
4. **Strengthen enforcement** of our policies, through increased monitoring of and where necessary intervention at gambling premises in the borough. This is with the aim of ensuring that operators are complying with our policies and the law and taking action where required to reduce harm to residents.

Priority 4: Improving pathways to support

We will work with partners, support services and colleagues across the Council to improve early identification of gambling-related harm and establish clearer and more effective routes to appropriate support. To achieve this, we will:

1. **Work with partners, including through a new Gambling Harms Partnership, to review current support services** to identify where any gaps exist in meeting the support needs of people in Brent and where stronger partnership working may help to strengthen provision in these areas.
2. **Where gaps are identified, work with partners to develop, and where appropriate commission, a clearer and more comprehensive pathway of support**
3. **Map existing contact points** where gambling harm may become visible to the Council **and refine processes to better target intervention at the first opportunity**. This includes working to increase awareness in residents and partners of the range of support available, so that the right support can be sought and provided at the right time
4. **Ensure staff across the council**, including those working in housing, debt advice, social care and public health **receive robust training** on how to recognise gambling harms and where to signpost residents for support.

How we'll get there

To support the delivery of our priorities, we will develop a detailed action plan setting out the specific actions, responsibilities and timescales needed to achieve the ambitions set out in this strategy. The strategy provides the high-level framework for our approach to tackling gambling harms in Brent, setting out our vision and priorities. The action plan will translate these ambitions into practical activity.

We know that we can't do this alone. The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has provided a framework of recommended approaches and will provide support to local areas in developing their plans. Delivery will take account of the respective responsibilities of the Council, NHS commissioners and voluntary-sector providers and will remain subject to relevant grant conditions, commissioning arrangements and available resources.

Delivery of this strategy will require strong partnership working, with organisations across Brent coming together to coordinate activity, share expertise and take collective action. To support this, a Gambling Harms Partnership will be formed, with membership from across the Council and key partners, including the NHS and VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Small Enterprise sector). The primary purpose of this partnership will be to provide local leadership and ensure effective partnership working to address and reduce the impact of gambling harms in Brent. One of their key roles will be to monitor progress against this strategy.

How we'll measure success

To evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy, we need ways to measure success. We know that there is limited local data available on gambling in Brent at present. This makes it challenging to establish an initial baseline of evidence from which to measure progress. One of the goals of Priority 2 is to establish baselines of data to enable future monitoring of gambling in Brent, and the effectiveness of the actions we take against it. We will continually update appropriate outcome measures within the action plan as data improves.

At the highest level, the outcomes we want to see are:

- **A reduction in gambling-related harm-** A reduction in the number and proportion of people in Brent experiencing gambling at levels associated with the most negative consequences, measured by the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI)
- **Earlier access to support for residents at risk of or experiencing gambling harm**
- **Improved understanding of gambling-related harm**- amongst both staff and residents
- **Stronger regulation and compliance-** Improved compliance by gambling premises with their regulatory responsibilities, supported by an increased programme of targeted, risk-based and proportionate inspections.
- **Stronger management of the local gambling environment**- A stronger evidence base for assessing the number, location and concentration of gambling premises, particularly in areas experiencing higher levels of deprivation or gambling-related harm, and the lawful and proportionate use of the Council's planning, licensing, and enforcement powers where appropriate.

[i] Gambling Survey for Great Britain (Annual Report 2025): Official statistics
[ii] A-Public-Health-Approach-Responsible-Safer-Gambling.pdf
[iii] Gambling-related harms evidence review: summary - GOV.UK
[iv] Gambling-related harms evidence review: summary - GOV.UK
[v] Gambling Needs Assessment 2024
[vi] Gambling Harms in Greater Manchester – Strategic Needs Assessment
[vii] Gambling Needs Assessment 2024
[viii] The geography of gambling premises in Britain | School of Geographical Sciences | University of Bristol
[ix] Industry Statistics - Annual report - Financial year April 2024 to March 2025 - Official statistics