

Reckless gamble with our high streets fuelling crime

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Councils must be allowed to regain control of their high streets to stop residents being blighted by even more betting shops, council leaders said today.

Concerns have been raised by councils over the negative impact to high streets from a takeover of late night bars, off licences, fast food takeaways and bookies. However, councils lack the powers to intervene and this is causing misery for local people.

For example, on one street in Hackney alone, there are eight betting shops, which increases poverty in the community. While in Liverpool, high numbers of takeaways and drinking venues are impacting negatively on public health and crime. No powers currently exist for local people to cap the numbers of premises they haven't sought for their local area.

Complicated and costly planning rules are also stopping councils taking control of their high streets. With betting shops – councils can only act to stop them setting up by giving a years notice of plans – otherwise they may have to pay out compensation.

Cllr David Parsons, Chair of the LGA Environment and Housing Board will tell the Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) Committee today:

"The Government must give councils new powers to stop betting shops setting up if they are likely to cause a public nuisance. The same applies to places which have been taken over by fast food takeaways, strip clubs and late night bars.

"At the moment, numbers cannot be restricted and this results in crime, disorder and misery for local people. The Government should look to tackle this issue.

"Costly planning rules which are tying up councils from acting at the moment must also be addressed. These concerns are shared widely and this problem is not limited to disadvantaged areas.

"We are seeing a reckless gamble with our high streets which is contributing to higher policing and health costs, in addition to reducing the quality of life for local residents."

The comments come as the CMS Committee holds a review into the Gambling Act 2005 and its effectiveness in protecting children and vulnerable people from the adverse effects of gambling.

Notes to editors

- Concerns about bookmakers have also been raised in the House of Commons, with Joan Ruddock MP introducing the Betting Shops Bill. This aims to create a new planning class for betting shops, making it harder for them to secure planning permission. For more information, please [click here](#)

Case studies

- **London Borough of Hackney** – Hackney has 64 betting shops which is three times the national average for a local authority area. At the same time the borough has areas of significant deprivation and a mapping of the location of these shops reveals that they cluster in the poorer areas of the borough. Another feature is that they are concentrated on particular streets with Mare St alone having eight shops and Stamford Hill with five. They are keen to tackle saturation by having new powers to consider the community impact of new premises.
- **Liverpool City Council** – Following complaints from residents, Liverpool has called for specific powers to deal with premises which materially impact upon the health and wellbeing of their local area. They make the case that too many premises serving alcohol and fast food within an area contribute towards anti-social behaviour and public health problems. In respect to licensing, they support the concept of a cap on the number of premises in each sector under the Licensing and Gaming Acts.

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