

2020.01.21

5 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the prospective introduction of restrictions on betting in Jersey (OQ.21/2020)

Although some Members have strayed into the area I will ask the question anyway and follow up on it. Does the Minister plan to follow the curbs introduced by the U.K. Government on betting shops accepting credit cards as a form of payment and the restrictions introduced in the U.K. on fixed-odd betting; and if not, why not?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

The regulations of all commercial gambling in Jersey is the responsibility of the Jersey Gambling Commission and they advise on these issues. To take the first point, the issue of credit cards is not relevant in Jersey as their use has never been allowed in betting shops and there are no plans to change that. On the second point, fixed odd betting. The Commission provided me with a briefing late last year and I can confirm to the Deputy that the stakes and prizes on these betting machines are the same in Jersey as they are in the U.K. This is because the data and systems that make the games work come from the U.K. so they all follow their codes of practice. Having said that, I am currently considering whether to direct the Commission to change their code to match that of the U.K. but this is a matter of housekeeping in a reality. The important thing is that the protections in place for gamblers in the U.K. are also applied in Jersey now.

2.5.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I appreciate the answer from the Minister that those 2 particular areas have been dealt with. Very good. However, at the present time in the U.K. it is estimated that 55,000 people take their lives because of gambling as a major factor. They have got themselves in debt and take their lives. It is also considered about 430,000 people are problem gamblers. I do not believe we have got any figures here. I have been looking through the Gambling Commission's report and I see they say that they have a website to help people who have a gambling addiction. How many people are going to look at a website and then try and decide whether they can lose their habit by just looking at a website? The Gambling Commission also say they have got £80,000 in their social fund, which is supposed to help gambling, will the Minister speak with the Gambling Commission and the other appropriate authorities in the Island and make sure we have an actual one-to-one personal service for gamblers so we can avoid any loss of life?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

That work is ongoing and we are working closely with education and mental health services and other areas. But the reality of the situation is where there is gambling there is a problem generally speaking. But in Jersey there is no evidence of largescale problems. The important thing to remember is that if people need help in Jersey they can get it not just through the Commission's website and its social responsibility page, which is not just in English but in Portuguese and Polish and other languages, all the routes to assistance that can be obtained to help people that might have a gambling problem here. So I would like to reassure the Deputy and Members that this is an ongoing agenda item for the Commission and my department. We will undertake to ensure that members of the public can gamble in a safe and as well-regulated environment as possible here in Jersey.

2.5.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Will restrictions on the use of credit cards in regard to locally registered betting sites be put in place; those overseen by the Jersey Gambling Commission?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

There are currently no plans to do that but that is a conversation I will have with the Commission.

2.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister's answer, while appearing comprehensive, avoided the point of the action that is taking place in the U.K. whereby online betting, not in betting shops, will be banned on credit cards; is that not the case? Will he consider doing similar here?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

As I understand it, if gambling websites are not allowed to take a payment by credit card that will apply to Jersey consumers.

[11:15]

2.5.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Will the Minister speak with the Viscount's Department and ask them when he is conducting investigations into the death of people through suicide whether gambling is a problem? I did speak with the [Deputy] Viscount and he is aware of one recently but the question does not really come up. Suicide is caused through many, many reasons but one is financial problems. Those who engage in gambling tend to have financial problems because they are addicted to it and using all their money. Will the Minister speak with the [Deputy] Viscount and ask when he is conducting investigations into the deaths of people he will enquire whether gambling was a factor and publish something in that regard? Then we will have the facts that the Minister says he does not have.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Quite simply, the answer to that would be yes and I undertake to make sure further investigations are as thorough as possible.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Question 6, the Deputy of St. Martin will ask of the Minister for Children and Housing.

Deputy R. Labey:

Sorry, Sir, on the Consolidated Order Paper question 6 is my question to the Minister for Education. It was late because of an administrative error or an error on my part but it is there on the Consolidated Order Paper as question 6.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you ever so much, I must have been working from the penultimate version of the Order Paper.