

Harmful Gambling Guidance

1. Introduction

Harmful gambling is a social concern for all, and as a council we want to ensure the issue is given the appropriate awareness and exposure and pledge our full commitment to supporting employees who may be affected.

Harmful gambling can have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of employees and their physical and mental health. It may often be the underlying factor for other difficulties employees may be experiencing which can often go unnoticed due to the fear, shame and stigma attached to acknowledging that there is a problem.

As a council we are devoted to caring for the health and wellbeing of our workforce. We aim to create and promote a culture where colleagues feel confident enough to raise issues about harmful gambling and seek the help and support they need. One where managers feel confident in holding conversations and providing the appropriate level of support to those who need it.

This guidance has been developed to support the Harmful Gambling Policy and the Council's pledge to the Workplace Harmful Gambling Charter (LINK), in partnership with our recognised trade unions.

It provides information on:

- Defining harmful gambling
- The impact of harmful gambling on individuals and others
- Spotting the signs of harmful gambling
- What you can do as a manager
- What you can do as an employee
- Workplace support
- National support

2. What is Harmful Gambling?

Whilst gambling can be a harmless form of entertainment for most people, it does entail a risk of losing control over time and money spent, which may cause economic problems, distress and other kinds of harm not only to the individual but also to significant others and society at large.

Harmful gambling is when an individual's gambling starts to cause problems for themselves or others – for example, if:

- individuals are starting to have some stress associated with gambling
- it's starting to put financial pressure on an individual
- it's causing problems with some of your relationships

Harmful gambling often contributes to other problems such as, drug or alcohol misuse, employment, homelessness or crime.

Harmful gambling directly affects an estimated 430,000 people in Britain, with a further 1,985,000 deemed as being at risk of developing a gambling problem. An estimated 5-8 other people are affected by someone else's gambling problem. This makes gambling a significant social issue.

Harmful Gambling can impact:

Financially

- Debt
- Non-payment of debt
- Court summons
- CCJs or repossession
- Pay day loans
- Borrowing or stealing

Health

- Extreme emotion/mood swings
- Difficulty sleeping
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts

Relationships

- Arguing with partners, family or friends
- Lack of interest in other social activities
- Isolation
- Violence or abuse

Employment

- Lack of motivation and performance
- Disengagement
- Timekeeping
- Absence
- Misusing working time or equipment

3. Spotting the Signs

It is not easy to tell whether an employee is having gambling related issues, as most individuals are able to maintain consistent behaviour on a day to day basis for long periods of time.

Those who have a harmless passion for gambling will often talk openly about placing bets or wins in their free time and many colleagues will take part in a lottery group or sweep stake at work. The difficulty is that others whose gambling has become a problem, often try to conceal it and it may be that the signs initially present themselves in other ways whilst the underlying cause can remain hidden for a long time.

The following behaviour patterns and characteristics, especially when combined, could be an indication that an employee may have a gambling problem:

Work

- A decline in work performance, inability to meet deadlines, and unreliability.
- Arriving late at work, leaving early.
- Taking extended lunch breaks and often calling in sick.
- Gambling when should be working.

Physical

- Clothes, car and other belongings gradually change to appear below the individual's usual standards.
- Substance use/misuse.
- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

Behaviour/Demeanour

- Seems depressed, anxious or stressed,
- Moody and irritable, is tired and has difficulties concentrating.
- Appearing distracted or pre-occupied with something
- No longer talks much about personal interests and leisure activities

Financial

- Stating various reasons for being out of cash and why money is urgently needed.
- Borrowing money from colleagues.
- Asking for more hours of work.
- Usually having little money to spend but suddenly having a lot of money (after a substantial gambling win).

4. What can we do?

What can managers do?

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing gambling related harm, they should facilitate a conversation at the earliest opportunity to be able to discuss the situation and identify and implement appropriate support. Shying away from the subject can perpetuate

fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

A sympathetic and appropriate approach from employers and managers is crucial to provide employees with the support that they need. Above all, it is important to listen to employees and respond sympathetically to any requests for support at work.

Managers know their employees better than anyone and through regular one to one meetings they are able to pick up on early warning signs that an individual may be struggling.

The [one to one template](#) and [Sensitive Conversations Guide](#) includes a key focus on employee wellbeing and provide a safe space to discuss any difficulties an employee may be facing and to agree the appropriate support. Every conversation a manager has with an employee who may be experiencing personal issues will be different. Sometimes, a team member may feel able to be very open with their manager from the very first meeting. In other situations, it may be difficult for the employee to open up and might take several conversations.

Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising a gambling issue. This will help to identify the support they need.

Managers should consult the guidance and tools available to them to support the conversation with the employee. These will vary depending on the situation.

For example, depending on the severity of the signs or evidence, or lack of, managers may need to start the conversation at different points. Managers should also consult others where appropriate, for example, where it becomes appropriate to seek advice from other services such as HR or Occupational Health.

Managers should consider the views of all those involved in discussions and agree a joint [support plan](#) with the employee which may include a combination of internal and external sources. The support plan should be documented, monitored and reviewed regularly. In addition to the employee's wellbeing managers should also consider the impact on colleagues and the organisation and consider these alongside other relevant policies.

Individual support may include, but is not limited to:

- Changes to working times and patterns.
- Use existing flexible working policies such as Flexible Leave and Annual Leave to assist with relevant appointments, for example, with support agencies.
- Referring to Occupational Health for further advice.
- Signpost to the Council's employee assistance programme.
- Identify a supportive colleague to talk to away from the work environment, such as a [Workplace Wellbeing Champion](#).

If an employee's performance is suffering as a result of harmful gambling and continues to suffer after the appropriate support has been given, or the employee is having periods of sickness as a result of harmful gambling then please see advice from HR.

What can the employee do?

All employees are responsible for looking after their own health and wellbeing and to care for the health and wellbeing of others.

Any concern they have about their own wellbeing that of others should be raised with their manager in the first instance.

It is important employees engage with any support plans that are developed.

What can we do together?

Care

- Be aware of and promote [wellbeing initiatives](#)
- Help to create a culture of openness, raise and respond to concerns positively
- Be sensitive and respect confidentiality
- Ensure one to one conversations take place

Consult

- Tools to support the conversation - [One to one template](#), [Sensitive Conversations Template](#), [Wellbeing Champions](#).
- Colleagues who can help; trade union representatives or HR representatives for advice and guidance on support and the process.
- Specialist advice where it would be helpful, for example EAP for access to counselling or financial advice.

Consider

- What can managers and individuals do to help and support each other
- Workplace support: temporary adjustments, different types of leave, flexible working, Employee Assistance Programme
- Other policies that maybe impacted: Code of Conduct, Performance Capability, Sickness Absence Management
- Other people that maybe impacted

- Joint expectations and timeframes; monitor and review

5. Internal Support Services

There is a wide range of internal support on offer to support individuals experiencing harmful gambling:

- **Harmful Gambling Policy** (link) – which outlines the responsibilities and key principles to follow in relation to harmful gambling.
- **Harmful Gambling Workplace Charter** (link) – which underpins the Council’s commitment to tackling harmful gambling.
- [One to One Template](#) – conducting regular one to one’s are vital for engaging with employees and can provide a platform to unearthing personal and sensitive issues.
- [Approaching Sensitive Conversations – Guide and Template](#) - provides a safe and structured space to discuss any difficulties an employee may be facing and to agree the appropriate support.
- [My Wellbeing Hub](#) - contains all of the links from the Councils wellbeing council offer from Occupational Health, Public Health and Workplace Vision.
- [Employee Wellbeing Champions](#) - are employees who volunteer to focus on improving the wellbeing of their colleagues, share best practice and signpost to wellbeing initiatives.
- [Occupational Health](#) - provides quality services and advice to employees and managers across the council and partner organisations.
- [Employee Assistance and Counselling Service](#) - offers free, confidential advice and counselling on a wide range of issues from financial advice to general wellbeing. The programme is available 24/7 and aims to support employees with both personal and work related issues.

6. External Support Services

There is a wide range of external support on offer to support individuals experiencing harmful gambling:

- [NHS Inform – Problem Gambling](#) – provides a toolkit which includes a self help page and a live chat forum for individuals suffering from harmful gambling.
- [Gam Care](#) - provides information, advice and support for anyone affected by problem gambling. It operates the National Gambling Helpline and provides treatment for problem gamblers and their families.

- [Beacon Counselling Trust – Problematic Gambling](#) - is a counselling charity, which employs fully qualified counsellors who have extensive experience working with a range of mental health issues which include gambling.
- [Citizens Advice - Gambling](#) – offers free and confidential advice to start dealing with gambling related debts as well as getting help to stop gambling.
- [Mind – Gambling Addiction Support](#) – provides a list of support service to help with gambling and addiction.

This guidance was developed in conjunction with Sandwell Council's recognised Trade Union colleagues and Occupational Health.