



Wirral's Strategy to Reduce Gambling-Related Harms 2025-2030





Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
Our vision	5
Our aims	5
Our approach	6
Note on language	6
WHERE ARE WE NOW?	7
Gambling and gambling-related harms	8
Gambling in England and Wirral	10
Evidence Review	11
National and local policy	17
Local support	18
WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?	19
Strategic Priority 1: Awareness Raising, Education and Training	22
Strategic Priority 2: Safeguarding Children and Young People	23
Strategic Priority 3: Regulation and Licensing	24
Strategic Priority 4: Developing the Local Evidence Base	25
Strategic Priority 5: Improving Pathways for Signposting, Treatment and Support	26
HOW DO WE GET THERE?	27
HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE ARE THERE?	29

Executive summary

Gambling-related harm is often a hidden public health issue affecting individuals, families, and communities. Harms can include financial hardship, mental health problems, relationship breakdown, suicidal ideation, crime, and safeguarding risks particularly for children and vulnerable groups.

Wirral's strategy to reduce gambling-related harms is the first of its kind for Wirral and outlines our plans to adopt a public health approach that prioritises harm reduction, prevention, early intervention, and support for those affected by gambling-related harms. It describes our future vision for Wirral and provides a comprehensive framework that demonstrates our commitment to preventing and reducing gambling-related harms.

This strategy is part of a broader suite of initiatives aimed at identifying, reducing, and managing the harms of addiction and it supports the increased focus on gambling-related issues as highlighted in the 2024/2025 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health: From Darkness to Light, from Harm to Hope: Journeys of addiction.

Wirral's strategy to reduce gambling-related harms describes how we will take a public health approach across five core themes.

We will deliver this strategy through strong partnership working, adopting a public health approach, and maintaining a clear focus on reducing inequalities and protecting those most at risk. Progress will be overseen by a multi-agency Gambling Harms Steering Group reporting into a wider Strategic Addiction Partnership Board and will be informed by people with lived experience of gambling-related harm. The steering group is developing a linked Action Plan to support the implementation of strategic priorities.

Together, we will create a safer, healthier and more resilient Wirral where fewer people experience gambling-related harms, and everyone knows where to turn for help.

Our Strategic Priorities

- 1** Awareness Raising, Education and Training — empowering individuals and professionals to recognise gambling harms and how to access support
- 2** Safeguarding Children and Young People — protecting young people from harm through prevention, education, and early intervention
- 3** Regulation and Licensing — using local regulatory powers to create safer gambling environments and protect vulnerable people
- 4** Developing the Local Evidence Base — improving local data, insight, and lived experience engagement to inform action
- 5** Improving Pathways for Signposting, Treatment and Support — ensuring clear, compassionate, and accessible routes to help for all those affected

Introduction

Our vision

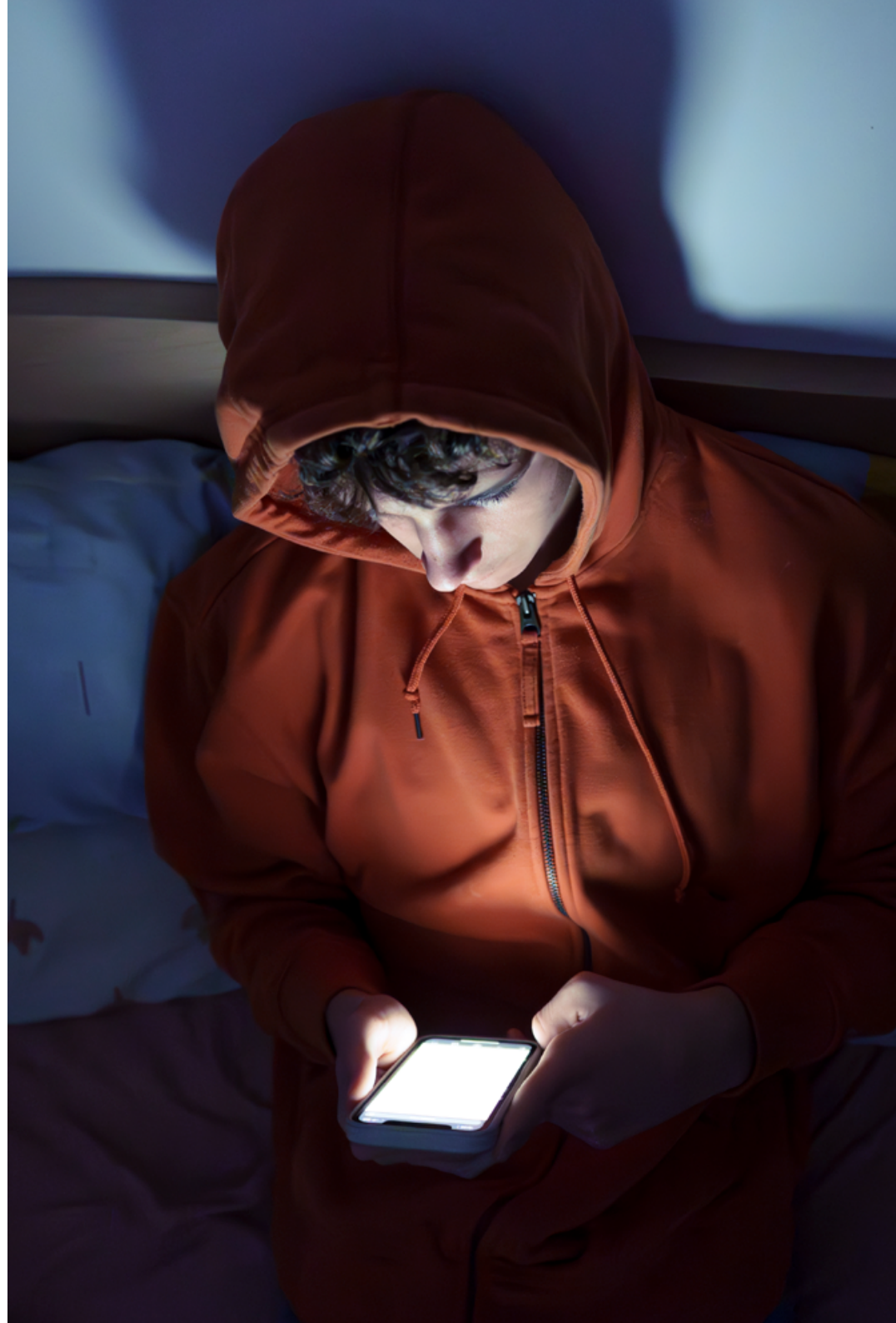
Wirral is committed to being a place where everyone can live free from the harms of gambling

Our aims

This strategy sets out a high-level framework to guide the collective efforts of local partners in preventing and reducing gambling-related harms across Wirral.

Our overarching aims are to:

- Provide clear strategic direction and leadership on tackling gambling-related harms within Wirral
- Promote a whole-systems, partnership approach within Wirral - recognising that gambling-related harm is a complex public health, safeguarding, and inequality issue
- Protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults from the risks associated with gambling
- Strengthen prevention, early intervention, and support for people affected by gambling-related harm
- Reduce the stigma associated with gambling-related harms and promote open, compassionate conversations about risk and support
- Ensure that future actions are informed by local data, insight, and the voice of people with lived experience



Our approach

This strategy provides a high-level framework for action. It is designed to set the vision, priorities, and principles that will guide our work over the next four years.

We recognise that gambling-related harm can affect people from across the social spectrum but does not affect all groups equally. Our approach will particularly target action where risk and vulnerability are greatest — addressing the wider social and economic factors that increase harm. We will apply a public health lens to gambling-related harm, recognising it as a preventable health inequality issue so will prioritise upstream prevention and early intervention wherever possible.

The strategy sets out the high-level vision and priorities. A detailed Action Plan and Evaluation Framework will be developed and maintained by the multi-agency Gambling Harms Steering Group. This approach allows us to respond flexibly to emerging issues, new evidence, and feedback from our communities.

Note on language

Everyone who gambles is at risk of addiction and of experiencing harms related to gambling. The language we use to discuss gambling matters. Most of us talk about gambling and gambling addiction in the same way, and that is influenced by the gambling industry.

There can be inconsistencies with the way language is used when talking about gambling harms, some of which can be stigmatising and can add to harm. We need to move away from language that adds to stigma and prejudice and move towards language that increases understanding and encourages people to seek support.

The language used in this strategy and all associated documents will use terms that are from a whole person perspective as recommended by a language guide developed to reduce stigma associated with the language used when talking about gambling ([Language guide](#)). This guide was developed by professionals working in gambling harms in Greater Manchester, the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber regions (based on their expertise working in this area), as well as individuals with lived experience of gambling-related harms providing their insights.

Our language choices will intentionally move away from labelling and blaming individuals, which can be stigmatising. Blaming people affected causes more harm and increases shame – this can make it hard to talk about what's happening. At the same time, we recognise that people can be empowered with the right language and own their recovery.



**Where are
we now?**

Gambling and gambling-related harms

What is gambling?

Gambling describes an activity where a person risks a loss for a possible gain in an activity of uncertain outcome. This includes casino games, sports betting, bingo, scratch cards and lotteries, and features of gambling are present in popular online gaming and cryptocurrency. There is increasing evidence that gambling products can be addictive, with the potential to cause significant and long-lasting harm.

The reasons given for gambling can be grouped into five broad themes: enhancement, challenge, coping and escapism, social, and money. Different themes are associated with different gambling activities. Online activities tend to be more strongly associated with motives relating to coping and escapism, whereas in person activities tend to be more strongly associated with enhancement and social reasons. According to the gambling commission, the most popular reasons given as to why respondents gambled was 'for the chance to win big money' and 'because it's fun'.

What are gambling-related harms?

Research has shown that harms associated with gambling are wide-ranging. These include not only harms to the individual gambler but their families, close associates and wider society. Gambling-related harm collectively describes the various adverse consequences of gambling, which broadly include effects on:

- Physical and mental health
- Relationships and families
- Finances, employment, and education
- Crime and violence

There are important mental health harms including an association with diagnosed mental health conditions, and a person affected by gambling is likely to experience feelings of isolation guilt and hopelessness. One UK study estimated a person experiencing gambling harms is over five times more likely to attempt suicide and there is on average one gambling-related suicide per day in the UK.

Addictions are not mutually exclusive; the environmental and genetic factors that lead people to be at greater risk in one area of addiction are common across other forms of addiction. For example, a 2023 Public Health England report found there is a clear association between increased alcohol consumption and gambling at all levels of harm.

Gambling can be associated with crime. A survey of prisoners in England found 23% of prisoners completing the survey reported that they think they have a gambling problem, 4% said gambling directly contributed to being in prison, and gambling had resulted in debt (14%), relationship issues (11%) and job loss (5%).

Gambling harms are measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), which uses the following scale:

- 0 = no identified problems
- 1-2 = low risk of problems
- 3-7 = moderate risk of problems
- 8+ = experiencing problem gambling

Why does it matter?

Gambling-related harm is a neglected and under-recognised public health problem, which seriously impacts on health and wellbeing. The combined economic and social costs of gambling are estimated to be between £1.05 billion - £1.77 billion in the UK, including an estimated £119.5 million of direct health harms.

Public Health England (2023) published a review that highlighted people at risk of gambling-related harms are concentrated in the North of England in areas of higher deprivation and may already be experiencing greater health inequalities.

There have been growing calls by the public health community, people with lived experience, local and national government that a population-level approach is needed to tackle this public health issue.

Responsibilities as a partnership

Local authorities have a statutory role to regulate local gambling premises and can use a range of tools to support the prevention of gambling-related harms. The 2005 Gambling Act sets out how gambling in Great Britain is regulated. In the act, gambling is defined as playing a game of chance for a prize, betting and participating in a lottery.

Councils are not responsible for providing treatment for gambling-related harms, but there are a range of ways in which different services can support people into the right treatment and support. Gambling may also be driving demand for other council service areas, including children's, family and adult social services, treatment and early intervention services, homelessness and wider housing services and financial inclusion and debt advice services.

All partners are responsible for identifying those at risk of gambling-related harms amongst those they work with and signposting them to appropriate support. This strategy aims to ensure that this is practical and achievable for all Wirral residents.



Gambling in England and Wirral

Gambling in England

Individuals experiencing harm from gambling, or their families or friends, rarely present to health or social care services with gambling harms identified as the main cause for concern.

This may be due to shame and embarrassment, but also because the harm manifests in a variety of different ways and includes anxiety, depression, debt, housing issues, use of food banks, substance misuse, criminality, domestic abuse and suicide ideation. It is for this reason that gambling is a “hidden harm”. Currently, the majority of data is estimated, and the true extent of harm caused by gambling in the UK remains unknown.

The Health Survey for England in 2021 estimated that 54.7% of men and 44.9% of women participated in gambling activity in the previous 12 months in England (Figure 1). This data is likely to be hugely underestimated and is only captured by those who admit to partaking in gambling activity. Despite being an illegal activity in those aged under 18 years, in 2024, almost one in three children (27%) aged 11–17 years in the UK said they had spent money on gambling activities in the previous year.

The most popular gambling activities (in the past 4 weeks) were lotteries, including National Lottery draws (31%) and other charity lottery draws (16%).

Proportion (%) of males and females partaking in gambling activity in the previous 12 months (2021) in England

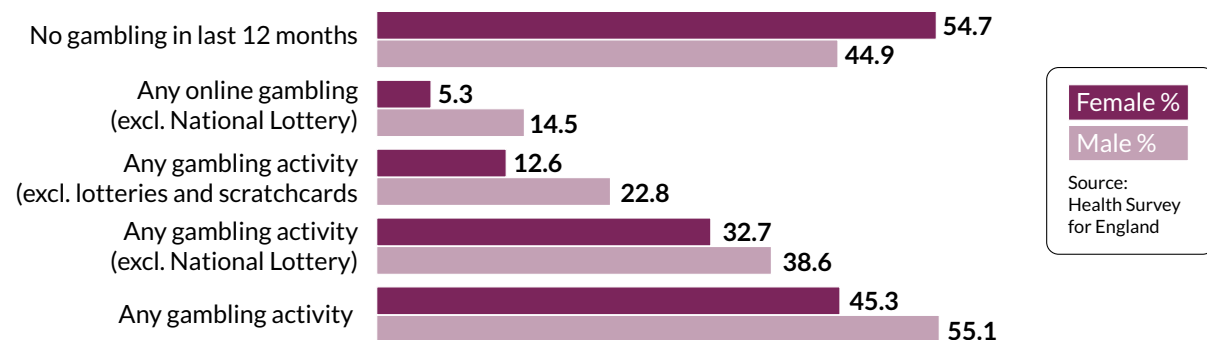


Figure 1: Proportion of males and females partaking in gambling activity in the previous 12 months, England (Health Survey, 2021)

Following lotteries, the next 3 most popular activities were scratchcards (12%), betting (10%) and online instant win games (7%). The National Lottery is the most common type of gambling across all age groups, except among younger people, where scratch cards are more common. Overall gambling participation is highest for males aged 45 to 54 years old. However, removing lottery-draw only players shifts the age profile downwards, resulting in males aged 25 to 34 having the highest gambling participation rates.

There are differences between males and females when it comes to the different betting activities. Men were almost ten times more likely to gamble on virtual gaming machines in bookmakers compared to women.

This gender split was reversed for bingo cards or tickets (not online), where women were twice as likely as men to gamble. Online gambling (e.g. poker, bingo, instant win, and casino games) was similar across the two sexes.

The Office for Health Improvements and Disparities estimates that in England, there are almost 1.6 million adults who gamble who may benefit from some type of treatment or support for gambling-related harms.

Wirral context

Regionally, North West England exhibits a higher proportion of individuals affected by someone else's gambling (8%) compared to the British average (7%), indicating a broader community impact. Additionally, the demand for support among those experiencing problem gambling in the North West is lower (57%) than the national average (65%), highlighting potential barriers to accessing assistance.

There is limited data about the prevalence of gambling in Wirral, and the data that we do have is largely modelled from national estimates. Figure 2 shows estimated levels of gambling problems for Wirral compared to the Great Britain average. Whilst the prevalence appears to be lower in Wirral for all levels of risk, this should be interpreted with caution.

National research indicates that gambling-related harms are often under-reported, reflecting the hidden and stigmatised nature of gambling at a harmful level. Lower prevalence in Wirral may also reflect demographic and socio-economic factors, such as lower levels of gambling participation or differences in gambling product availability compared to larger cities. Local intelligence highlights pockets of vulnerability, particularly in areas of higher deprivation where gambling opportunities are more concentrated.

It is also important to recognise that even relatively low levels of gambling harm can have significant impacts on individuals, families and communities – and that preventative action remains essential to protect those most at risk.

Prevalence of gambling at a harmful level

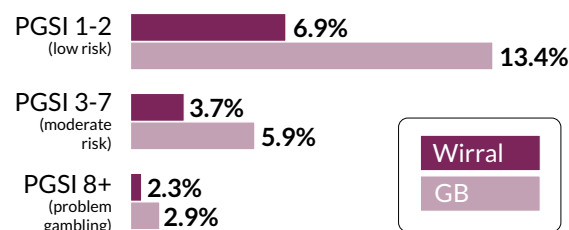


Figure 2: Prevalence of gambling at a harmful level by severity in Wirral and Great Britain, GambleAware 2025

Figure 3 shows the proportion of adults who gamble and would like access to treatment or support, by level of gambling problems. As would be expected, the data shows that the demand for support increases as the severity of gambling problems rises. However, it is important to note that even among those experiencing lower levels of gambling harm, a proportion still express a need for help or advice. This highlights the importance of accessible early intervention and preventative support. This also reinforces the need to ensure local referral pathways are

visible, non-stigmatising and responsive to a broad spectrum of gambling-related harms – not only for those experiencing the most severe problems.

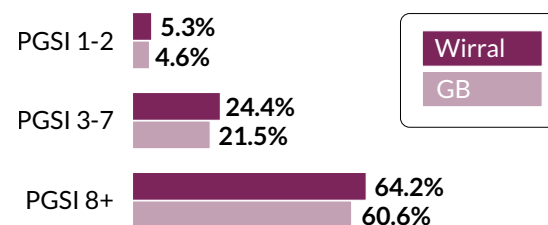


Figure 3: shows the proportion of adults who gamble and would like access to treatment or support, by level of gambling problems (GambleAware, 2025)

On the next page, Map 1 shows the most recent map of existing off-track betting premises ("Bookies") overlaid on IMD 2019 deprivation score. The number of licensed betting premises in Wirral has reduced from 61 in 2018 to 27 as of 2024, reflecting the industry shift to online forms of gambling. In 2018, 3 of these premises were in the 20% least deprived areas of Wirral; in 2024 this has reduced to 0.

In comparison, in 2018, 57% of all betting premises in Wirral were in the 20% most deprived areas and in 2024 this has not fundamentally changed (reduced from 57% to 56%).

Map 1: Off-track betting premises ('Bookies') overlaid on IMD 2019 deprivation score



Case study: Liz's story

Liz is a 35-year-old Wirral resident who has lived in Wirral all her life. Liz started gambling in her late childhood and her gambling addiction was active for ten years.

Liz's addiction started as a fun hobby and source of entertainment. In her late teens/early 20's she would have a "flutter" on the football or attend the bingo in Birkenhead with her friends at work.

She found later (mid-20s) that her addiction progressed through the proliferation of online/smartphone apps, "I would never have started gambling, if it weren't for the smartphone apps." She found out that the bingo app and other gambling apps would offer free bets. Liz was able to 'gamble' via her phone contract at first, where the fees and 'services' were transferred to her contract bill.

This felt almost invisible and unseen to her, like free money. One day, from a single 50p bet, Liz won a £150- £200 prize, which she said was a "significant win" for her and "a trigger that got me into gambling". The idea of winning significant amounts of money from such a low stake was appealing to Liz. She also suffered domestic abuse with an ex-partner who had a gambling addiction and feels that this proximity probably worsened her addiction.

Liz would spend all of her money from her wages on gambling as soon as she was paid. She spoke about how over time her gambling addiction "spiralled out of control". It became part of every moment of her life.

She recounts moments where she would be gambling until the early hours of the morning: "I would be lying in bed at night next to my husband, with my phone on silent mode. I would be gambling until 4am [...] The only reason I would stop was because I ran out of money, which to be honest, was actually always a relief." She started spending more and more large sums of money: "At one point in my addiction I could put £2,000 on a spin and was able to do that every 20 seconds." The situation progressed further: "I got myself into a real mess with money [...] and would be taking out payday loans to fund my addiction."

As her addiction grew, Liz got involved in criminal activity to finance her gambling. She stole £323,000 from her former workplace. She explains that she stole with the intention of paying it back: "In my head I thought I will make all this money back; I will make everything okay."

She was arrested, charged and went to court, receiving a custodial sentence of two and a half years for stealing money. She went to prison in 2018/19, where she served one year of the sentence. While in prison she gave birth to her son who is now six years old. It was then that she realised that she had to get her life back on track. She started working with a trust while she was still in prison which supported her to get a degree.

After she left the prison Liz started working with a service that supports people who are dealing with gambling addictions

This case study was gathered for Wirral's Public Health Annual Report 2024/25. The participant's name is a pseudonym (not their real name).

Evidence Review

What does the evidence say?

As part of the development of this strategy, a review of national and international research and evidence has been undertaken to inform our approach.

This reflects our commitment to ensuring that the strategy is grounded in the best available evidence and aligns with emerging best practice in preventing and reducing gambling-related harms. An evidence-based approach is vital to understanding the complex nature of gambling-related harm, the risk factors that increase vulnerability, and the interventions that are most likely to be effective.

However, it is also recognised that gambling-related harm is often described as a 'hidden' or 'silent' issue, with significant levels of under-reporting and stigma. Consequently, the true extent of gambling harm is likely to be underestimated in existing data and research. This highlights the importance of complementing national and international evidence with local insight, lived experience, and community engagement to ensure that our strategy is responsive to the needs and experiences of people in our area.

Whilst this strategy has used a literature review to inform it, it was only able to review the evidence available (i.e., published). Due to gambling not being viewed through a public health lens until recently and the lack of independent funding, there is insufficient UK data and evidence on the broader social and environmental factors, as well as the full extent of the harms experienced, particularly financial harms.

Research has tended to focus on gambling behaviour (particularly the prevalence of gambling and 'problem gambling'), with very limited recent research exploring attitudes towards and reasons for gambling among adolescents and young adults.

The changing face of gambling

Gambling is very heavily marketed, easily accessed and extremely profitable to the gambling industry. Within the UK, gambling is a £15.1 billion pound industry. With opportunities to gamble on most high streets and, with access to the internet in virtually every home, tackling this issue is a challenge.

Influence of the gambling industry

The UK has one of the biggest gambling markets in the world. Research, education and treatment of gambling-related harm is primarily commissioned and delivered by the Gambling Commission, GambleAware, and the NHS.

Because of GambleAware's role in distributing voluntary industry donations, some stakeholders have expressed concern about possible conflicts of interest due to the potential influence of the gambling industry. The Charity Commission reviewed GambleAware in 2024 and concluded that the Commission was assured that GambleAware was taking appropriate steps to ensure its independence from the gambling industry.

It is important to acknowledge the significant influence of the gambling industry in shaping the environment in which gambling takes place. The industry invests heavily in marketing, advertising, product design, and technology with the aim of maximising participation and profit whilst also building legitimacy of the industry. This creates a landscape where gambling is normalised, highly visible, and often targeted towards vulnerable groups.

According to industry narratives, responsibility for gambling-related harm is attributed to individuals, particularly those deemed as engaging in gambling at a harmful level, which deflects attention from corporate conduct. The gambling industry also exerts considerable influence over research into gambling and harms from gambling, which helps it to retain control of the framing and messaging surrounding these issues.

The gambling industry is following the playbook of other industries that have a significant influence on the commercial determinants of health, such as tobacco and alcohol. The introduction of restrictions on marketing and increasing taxation on the products associated with higher risks of harm have been used to reduce tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened drink consumption and some research has suggested that similar policies could be implemented for gambling, although there is also a risk that higher taxation can push people towards black market, illicit and illegal products.

Understanding key drivers of gambling-related harms

Gambling-related harms do not occur in isolation; they are shaped by a complex interplay of individual, environmental, and societal factors. Understanding these key drivers is essential for developing effective prevention, early intervention, and support approaches.

Gambling is normalised through the accessibility and availability of gambling products (both physical and online), the design of gambling activities to encourage prolonged play or spending, and pervasive marketing.

At an individual level, risk factors for experiencing gambling-related harms may include mental health difficulties, financial hardship, experience of trauma, social isolation, and experiencing other addictions.

However, gambling-related harm is not solely a result of individual behaviour or choice – it is influenced by wider structural and environmental drivers.

Social and economic inequalities play a critical role, with evidence showing that people living in more deprived areas are more likely to experience gambling-related harm, despite often spending less on gambling overall. Additionally, stigma, shame, and a lack of visible support services can act as barriers to help-seeking.

Recognising these drivers reinforces the need for a whole-systems, preventative approach that addresses not only individual risk factors but also the broader commercial, social, and environmental conditions that enable harm to occur.

It is important to also acknowledge the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on gambling behaviours, which is likely to still be having an impact today. During 2020/21 almost one-quarter of online gamblers increased their gambling during lockdown, with this most likely to be on overseas gambling sites, instant scratch card gambling and Lotto.

The studies indicate a link between change in online gambling involvement during COVID-19 and increased mental health problems, including stress from boredom, and higher levels of depression and anxiety. Some groups were more likely to continue gambling more than usual (ethnic minority individuals who were current smokers and were less educated) as lockdown restrictions eased.

Young people and gambling

There is also growing public health concern regarding young people and gambling. Exposure to gambling for children and young people is predominantly in the online world – young people are encountering gambling advertisements on Instagram, TikTok and sporting apps when checking live results and

through watching content creators gamble and sharing the outcomes of high-stake games.

The sphere of influence on children and young people has expanded beyond close family and friends to celebrities, online influencers and sporting figures (particularly footballers). Formal partnerships and endorsements between celebrities, sports professionals, and gambling organisations increase the likelihood of young people being exposed to gambling-related content.

Teenage boys are at heightened risk of exposure. While gaming is popular across genders, research by the gambling commission found boys often engage more intensely in gaming which increases their exposure to gambling-like features and in-game purchases. They were also more interested in football, heightening their exposure with the links between football clubs, betting apps and sponsorship by gambling organisations.

Wirral Public Health team's commitment to addressing addiction

The Public Health Annual Report (PHAR) highlights key health and wellbeing challenges facing our local communities and provides information and evidence on key issues that partners should prioritise in the forthcoming year. The focus of the 2024/25 Annual Public Health Report is on the important public health issue of addiction in Wirral, including substance use (smoking, drugs and alcohol) and gambling. The key themes of the report are shown opposite.

Wirral's strategy to reduce gambling harms

This strategy fits into a suite of strategic documents aimed at addressing addiction, constituting the following:

- Public Health Annual Report – From Darkness to Light, From Harm to Hope: Journeys of Addiction 2024-2025
- Wirral Drugs Strategy 2023-2027
- Wirral's Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms 2025-2030
- Wirral Alcohol Strategy (due September 2025)



National and local policy

National picture

The Gambling Act 2005 ('the 2005 Act'), which came fully into force on 1 September 2007, was broadly designed not only to consolidate existing gambling legislation but also to update the regulatory structure for online gambling, casinos and what were known as Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs), on which roulette and other casino games can be played in betting shops. The Act also created a new unified industry regulator, the Gambling Commission.

The 2005 Act was based on three key principles, which are set out in section 1 of the Act:

- Gambling should not be a source of crime or disorder, associated with crime or disorder or be used to support crime.
- Gambling should be conducted in a fair and open way.
- Children and other vulnerable people should be protected from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

In recent years, the UK government has introduced several significant policy measures to address gambling-related harms:

Gambling White Paper: In April 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published a comprehensive White Paper titled "High stakes: gambling reform for the digital age."

This document outlined plans for a mandatory levy on betting firms, new player protection checks, and stake limits for online slots, reflecting the government's commitment to updating gambling laws to better protect vulnerable users in the digital era.

Public Health England's Evidence Review:

Public Health England conducted an evidence review, updated in January 2023, which estimated that gambling-related harms cost society at least £1.27 billion annually. This review highlights the significant public health impact of gambling.

Statutory Levy on Gambling Operators:

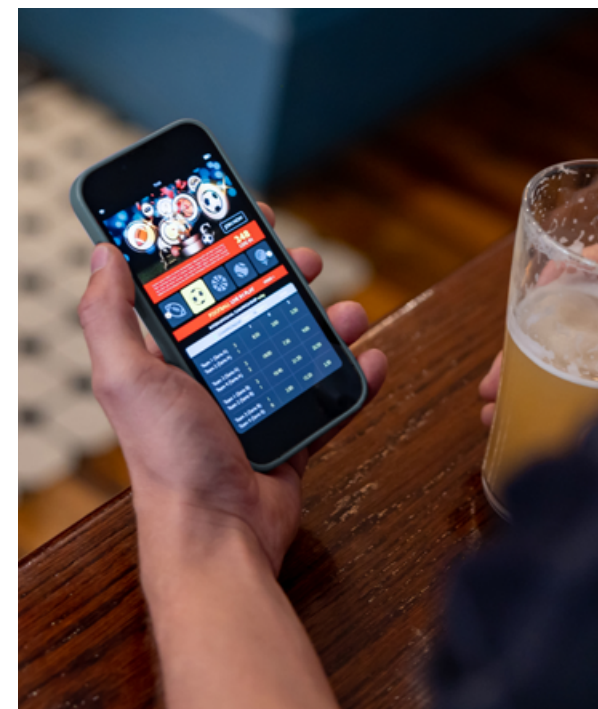
In November 2024, the government announced plans to implement a mandatory levy on gambling operators. This levy is designed to generate approximately £100 million annually, with funds allocated to OHID and the NHS for treatment services, as well as to research.

Online Slot Stake Limits: Concurrently, the government confirmed the introduction of stake limits for online slot games. Adults over 25 years old are subject to a £5 per spin limit, while those aged 18 to 24 have a £2 per spin cap. These measures aim to mitigate the risks associated with high-stakes online gambling.

Local policy

Licensing Authorities are required by the Gambling Act 2005 to publish a statement of the principles which they propose to apply when exercising their functions.

Wirral Borough Council, as the Licensing Authority, published a Statement of Gambling Policy in December 2024.



Local and National support

Beacon Counselling Trust

Beacon Counselling Trust offer advice, guidance and therapeutic support to individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing gambling-related harms, including anyone affected by someone else's gambling, across the North West of England.

There is no waiting list to access support, which can be offered via one-to-one sessions, peer-led support, couples' sessions, or groups. Their treatment and support can be delivered either face-to-face, via video call, or on the phone, depending on a person's needs. Beacon work with a range of communities, to raise awareness and offer appropriate support, including veterans, South Asian communities, young people, and individuals that have been through the criminal justice system. People can self-refer.

beaconcounsellingtrust.co.uk

Telephone: 0151 226 0696

email: treatmentteam@beaconcounsellingtrust.co.uk

Citizens Advice Wirral

The Gambling Aftercare service supports anyone impacted by gambling, including friends and family members, by offering practical and emotional assistance to rebuild stability and well-being. The service offers:

- **Practical advice:** Trained advisers can help with issues like managing debts, applying for benefits, or securing housing.

- **Specialist counselling:** Through their partnership with Beacon Counselling Trust, free counselling is provided for anyone aged 16 and over affected by gambling.

- **Holistic support:** Together with Social Prescribing Link Workers, well-rounded support is offered to address the wider impacts of gambling on life.

Support is provided through phone, video, or face-to-face appointments, as well as walk-up advice sessions at multiple locations.

citizensadvicewirral.org.uk/projects/gambling-aftercare

email: Send "Gambling Support" to

social@citizensadvicewirral.org.uk

NHS Gambling Treatment Clinics: NHS Northern Gambling Service

This service specialises in taking an holistic approach to delivering support and treatment for gambling related harms. It offers a comprehensive assessment of the person's situation followed by a treatment/response plan, that might include interventions such as weekly Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and supporting the person to increase their social support e.g by accessing an abstinent recovery community. People can self-refer.

Telephone: 0300 300 1490

email: referral.ngs@nhs.net

Primary Care gambling Service

The Primary Care Gambling Service (PCGS) is a free and confidential NHS service for adults over the age of 18 who are experiencing harms from gambling. It is a London based Service but support people from all over the country. The service also provides support with related physical and mental health problems.

It works in partnership with 3rd party organisations (including Adferiad – details below) to provide a range of support and therapies, either face-to-face, on-line, or on the phone. People can self-refer.

Telephone: 0300 0300 111

Adferiad Residential Detox programme

Adferiad offers places for residential detox at their two Parkland Place projects, based in North Wales and Lancashire. The service provides a programme based on a non-clinical therapeutic model led by a Consultant Psychiatrist and staffed by qualified nurses.

People can contact the services directly.

Telephone: North Wales – 01492 203421 |

Lancashire – 01254 200000

email: info@parklandplace.org.uk

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a man with short dreadlocks and a goatee, wearing a dark green t-shirt and a watch, is looking towards the left. In the background, a woman with long dark hair and glasses is sitting and looking forward. The text "Where do we want to be?" is overlaid in white.

**Where do
we want to be?**

A case for change

There is clear evidence that gambling has adversely affected the health and wellbeing of people in Wirral, and there is an evidence base by which we can progress with our next steps.

The process of developing this strategy has identified the research about gambling to include the “hidden harm” and stigma associated with gambling and that the support in Wirral is under-utilised. A multi-sector workshop held in January 2025 identified the requirement for assessment and screening tools to identify those affected by gambling, and to further identify those at risk of harm.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Wirral describes our population needs across the borough and the importance of improving mental and physical wellbeing, working in collaboration with our communities and considering the factors that influence health, with particular focus on wellbeing.

This strategy will impact positively in the prevention of mental ill-health, suicidal ideation, unemployment, financial insecurity, alcohol-related harms, homelessness, tobacco-related harm, substance misuse, domestic abuse and crime. This strategy will address the need for education, treatment and support, across the population, but will also address health inequalities and barriers to service provision, incorporating the evolving research and evidence-based approaches and learning from people with lived experience.

It also builds upon evidence that a sense of community connectedness, a need for a life purpose, and person-centred approaches are the cornerstone to a successful recovery for those experiencing gambling-related harms, as is also the case for other addictive behaviours.

This strategy must be independent from influence by commercial entities such as gambling operators. There is extensive evidence that the gambling industry actively shapes how health issues are framed.

The industry focuses on ‘individual responsibility’ and messages promoting gambling as an enjoyable, recreational and safe activity. This approach deflects attention away from the deliberately addictive and harmful products and practices used by gambling operators to maximise profits, which are solely generated from customer losses.

In the past, this has led to a narrow focus on unproven harm reduction interventions which stigmatise people who have experienced harms caused by gambling.

Our strategy is ambitious and aspirational. We want to prevent gambling-related harm, improve health and wellbeing, boost the local economy, and protect jobs, homes and financial security so that people in Wirral can live healthier and happier lives. We recognise that, in order to protect our population, we need to take action to prevent harm.

We will continue to work with our licensing department to use their compliance and enforcement work to ensure that local gambling premises are fulfilling their social responsibility requirements, and our tourism department to advertise town attractions that do not actively promote the gambling industry. It's very important that we get this balance right, between protecting people from the potentially life ruining effects of gambling-related harm, while respecting the freedom of adults to engage in a legitimate leisure activity.



Strategic priorities

The strategic priorities have been co-produced with partners, supported by the expertise of the Gambling-Related Harm Steering Group (see appendix), multiple workshops, evidence base in data, people with lived experience, published literature, and recommendations set out in the Local Government Association guidance document.

Theme	Objectives
Awareness Raising, Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scale up training programmes to facilitate awareness of gambling-related harm for frontline staff across different sectors Increase awareness and sign-up to Beacon Counselling Trust's Workplace Charter to reduce gambling-related harm Development of a further Gambling Harms Aware Borough event (June 2025) Include Gambling Harms on the programme of communications led by Public Health Addiction's team
Safeguarding Children and Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with schools and with trusted adults to incorporate awareness raising of gambling-related harm Work with Beacon Counselling trust to develop Children and Young People focused work programme Include gambling in safeguarding policies
Regulation and Licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use council and public health influence to inform, drive and steer national policy and legislation Work with Wirral licensing department to make Wirral a 'Gambling Harms Aware' borough Review and update council gambling advertising policy
Developing the local evidence base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map out existing evidence base including gaps Explore including questions around gambling - related harm in local Health and Wellbeing survey to better understand local issues Explore embedding screening tools into existing provider-patient interactions Work with primary care colleagues to improve data capture
Improving pathways for signposting, treatment and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map existing support services to inform a gap analysis of support needs for people affected by gambling in Wirral Develop a coordinated referral/treatment pathway that can be incorporated into training/education Improve pathways to recovery by connecting providers of gambling support with other services that promote ongoing wellbeing and help rebuild lives Ensure services are visible and accessible to all who need them

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Awareness Raising, Education and Training

Aim: To increase understanding of gambling-related harms across the Wirral population, ensuring individuals, families, communities, and professionals are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to prevent, identify, and respond to gambling-related harm.

Wirral has a strong record of collaborating to reduce harms related to other addictions, such as drugs and alcohol. However, gambling-related harm (GRH) is poorly understood and under-recognised. People affected by gambling often report having kept this concealed for reasons of shame, guilt, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and worry, as well as the stigma shown in judgemental language and stereotyped assumptions. Gambling is normalised in the general population with many not considering it as causing harm.

Awareness and education are essential preventative measures to mitigate GRHs. Many individuals and communities are unaware of the risks associated with gambling, the signs of harm, or the support available. By embedding consistent and accessible, awareness-raising and harm-prevention education and training across settings — including schools, workplaces, and frontline services — we can create an informed and resilient community able to engage with gambling safely and access support early when required.

Our long-term vision

Work with our local communities and organisations to increase knowledge of GRHs and available support services.

Achieve greater confidence amongst professionals in addressing GRHs.

Reduced stigma associated with seeking help for gambling-related issues.

To achieve this, we will...

- Collaborate with voluntary sector organisations and gambling support charities to provide training for professionals to help them to identify GRH and equip them to signpost to support
- Work with schools, colleges, and youth services to provide age-appropriate resources that address the risks of gambling, digital gambling (loot boxes, online gaming), and alongside this increase their financial literacy
- Encourage local businesses, particularly in the hospitality and betting sectors, to take part in responsible gambling training
- Increase the awareness of and sign-up to Beacon Counselling Trust's Workplace Charter to reduce gambling-related harm for organisations across Wirral
- Develop a Gambling Harms Aware Borough event (June 2025)

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Aim: To protect children and young people from the risks and harms associated with gambling, ensuring early intervention, prevention, and support are embedded within safeguarding systems, education settings, and youth-focused services.

Children and young people are being increasingly exposed to gambling-like activities, particularly online, through gaming, advertising, and social media. Exposure at an early age can normalise gambling behaviours and increase the risk of harm later in life. Safeguarding children from gambling-related harm is an important public health and child protection issue that requires coordinated action across schools, families, health services, and safeguarding partnerships.

Our long-term vision

Ensure work to reduce GRH for children and young people has a strong profile and is well integrated with wider children and young people programmes and workstreams

Give all children and young people in Wirral access to high quality education on GRHs

Ensure schools and organisations who work directly with young people feel confident to identify and address issues around GRHs.

Empower young people with skills and resilience to make informed choices and avoid harm

Protect children and young people from the harmful impacts of gambling advertising

To achieve this, we will...

- Work with schools to incorporate awareness raising of GRHs amongst young people and their trusted adults, especially of risks related to online gambling platforms, gaming features with gambling elements (e.g., loot boxes, skin betting) and advertising, sponsorship, and social media influences
- Work with Beacon Counselling Trust to develop a Children and Young People Strategy
- Ensure that local safeguarding partnerships recognise gambling harm as part of their strategic priorities and incorporate GRHs within safeguarding training, policy, and procedures
- Advocate for national policy changes that protect children from gambling advertising and exposure to other influences that encourage people to gamble
- Work with partners, locally and nationally, to ensure robust enforcement of age restrictions on gambling products, both online and in physical venues within the borough

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Regulation and Licensing

Aim: To use the local authority's regulatory and licensing powers proactively to create a safer gambling environment, prevent harm, and protect vulnerable individuals within the community.

Gambling industry voices tend to frame gambling as being a harmless leisure activity that is a personal choice and something individuals should enjoy 'responsibly'. They do not focus on the addictive and harmful products and practices used by gambling operators to maximise profits. This can lead to narratives which suggest the individual experiencing harm is a 'problem', and this stigma often leads to gambling harms being hidden.

Local authorities have a key role in regulating gambling premises and ensuring operators act responsibly and in line with the objectives of the Gambling Act 2005 particularly the protection of children and vulnerable people from harm. Regulation and licensing are important tools not only for compliance enforcement but also for shaping the local gambling landscape in a way that promotes public health and community wellbeing.

This strategic priority focuses on ensuring that gambling regulation is underpinned by a public health approach, balancing the licensing of gambling premises with the need to prevent harm and reduce risk.

Our long-term vision

Wirral will have a robust licensing framework that actively prevents gambling-related harm

Increased accountability of gambling operators to promote safer gambling environments

Reduced availability and impact of gambling in areas of high vulnerability or deprivation

Greater public confidence in the council's role as a responsible regulator and protector of community wellbeing

To achieve this, we will...

- Use the Council and Public Health voices to influence national policy and legislation
- Work with Wirral Council Licensing Authority to make Wirral a 'Gambling Harms Aware' borough
- Participate in regional and national networks to share best practice on regulation and licensing for gambling harm prevention, and to have a collective and stronger voice to influence national Government
- Monitor emerging forms of gambling, digital gambling products and new technologies to assess their local impact, and ensure local regulatory bodies are aware of these evolving risks
- Review and update Wirral Council gambling advertising policy

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Developing the Local Evidence Base

Aim: To build a robust local evidence base on GRHs to inform decision-making, inform harm prevention messaging, target resources effectively, and measure progress in reducing harm across Wirral.

National research shows that gambling-related harm is often hidden, under-reported, and poorly understood at a local level. Many harms — including financial hardship, mental health issues, family breakdown, and crime — may not be immediately identified as gambling-related.

By developing a stronger local evidence base, we can gain a clearer picture of gambling harms in Wirral, identify at-risk populations, assess the impact of local interventions, and ensure that policies and services are responsive to emerging trends and community needs.

Our long-term vision

Improved local intelligence on the scale, nature, and impact of GRHs and risks to inform policy and practice

Data-driven decision making across licensing, public health, and community services

Enhanced identification of at-risk populations and geographical hotspots

Stronger partnership working through data sharing and collective insight

Evidence of what works locally to prevent and reduce gambling harm — enabling continuous improvement

To achieve this, we will...

- Work with local partners including health services, debt advice agencies, schools, housing, Social Care, and criminal justice to embed routine data collection on gambling-related harms where appropriate
- Explore opportunities to include gambling harm screening tools within existing assessment, referral, and recording systems (e.g. primary care social prescribing assessments)
- Explore including questions around GRHs in local Health and Wellbeing survey to better understand local issues
- Develop local protocols for data sharing between partners to build a comprehensive picture of gambling harm in the area
- Use local and national data to develop a detailed Local Area Profile (LAP) for gambling-related harms in Wirral, ensuring this data informs licensing, planning, commissioning and prevention activity
- Create opportunities for people with lived experience of gambling harm — including affected others — to share their insights and help shape local policy, services, and campaigns
- Review referrals into specialist GRH services to inform trend analysis

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5

Improving Pathways for Signposting, Treatment and Support

Aim: To ensure that individuals affected by gambling-related harm, including gamblers and their affected others, are fully aware of, and have timely access to clear, consistent, and effective pathways for information, support, and treatment.

Gambling-related harm often goes unrecognised or unreported, and many individuals do not seek help until they reach crisis point. Barriers to support include stigma, lack of awareness of available services, and uncertainty about where to go for help.

Through improving pathways for signposting, treatment, and support, we can ensure that people experiencing gambling harm are identified earlier and can access appropriate help. This will help reduce harm, improve recovery outcomes, and support wider wellbeing.

Our long-term vision

Increased awareness among residents and professionals of local and national support services for gambling harms with clear and consistent referral pathways

Ensure that all Wirral residents who need assistance for GRHs are accessing high-quality treatment or support

Upskill our wider workforce across the system so that they are capable and confident in supporting people who are at risk of GRHs

Strengthen the integration of treatment and support for GRHs with other pillars of our addiction services

Strengthen the connections between recovery communities and the wider Wirral community, harnessing the positive contributions of people in recovery to spread the positive message of the impact of recovery

To achieve this, we will...

- Map out existing support services (including NHS and third-sector provision, digital tools, peer support, and financial advice) to inform a gap analysis of support needs for people affected by gambling in Wirral
- Develop a coordinated and systematic assessment process, and referral/treatment pathway, for frontline services including the statutory and VCFSE sectors
- Improve pathways to recovery by connecting providers of gambling support with other services that promote ongoing wellbeing and help rebuild lives
- Ensure staff across local services, including health, housing, debt advice, schools, and social care, are trained to recognise gambling harms and can signpost to appropriate services
- Raise awareness that gambling harms extend beyond the individual and ensure support services for affected others are promoted alongside gambling treatment services
- Work with service providers to ensure support is culturally appropriate, non-judgemental, and accessible equitably where risk and vulnerability are greatest

A long, narrow metal pier with a grid-like surface extends from the foreground into a calm body of water. The water reflects the sky, which is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. In the distance, a low, dark landmass is visible on the horizon. The text "How do we get there?" is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font on the left side of the pier.

**How do we
get there?**

Action Plan

Delivering this strategy will require collective action, shared responsibility, and sustained commitment across local partners, services, and communities. While this document sets out the high-level strategic priorities and direction, the detailed work of implementation will be taken forward through a multi-agency Action Plan, which is currently being developed by the Gambling Harms Steering Group.

The Action Plan will translate the strategic priorities into practical, measurable actions and identify lead organisations, timescales, and outcomes. It will remain a live and evolving document, enabling partners to respond flexibly to emerging issues, new evidence, and the voice of local people with lived experience of GRHs.

How this fits with the wider council priorities

This strategy does not sit in isolation — it aligns closely with, and will be delivered alongside, wider council and system priorities. This includes our 2024/2025 Public Health Annual Report, which emphasises addressing addictions as a critical local health and inequality issue; the Council Plan, outlining our vision for fostering safe, healthy, and inclusive communities; and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which demonstrates our collective commitment to reducing health disparities and enhancing population wellbeing.

Through linking gambling harm reduction to the broader strategic aims of Wirral Council, we aim to ensure that action is joined up, embedded in existing structures, and contributes to wider efforts to create a healthier and more equitable local environment for Wirral residents.

Gambling-related harms are now widely recognised as a public health issue which require a broad response. Gambling-related harm is a complex problem with many different but often interlinked factors - no single measure is likely to be effective on its own in addressing it.



**How will we
know when
we are there?**

How will we measure success?

Annual reporting of key metrics.

There are national developments aimed at tackling GRHs. Over the course of the first year of the strategy implementation, we will develop outcomes that align with the metrics being developed nationally.

Measures will need to be relevant, timely and agreed with partners.

Evaluation

Evidence-based practice is a key feature of a public health approach so that we understand the impact we have and strive to continuously improve. Evaluation has been embedded in the design of this strategy, so that we can measure change and impact.

As explored in this strategy, there is only limited local data on gambling related harms: data is typically reported for groups rather than individuals; data availability is sparse, and the existing data is likely to underestimate the true scale of harms in Wirral. This does create a challenge to evaluation design, as some actions we undertake as part of this strategy will produce a baseline against which we can measure progress. We will also speak to people affected by gambling in Wirral to gauge whether we have achieved the actions we set out to.

Evaluation has been built into the design of interventions, and we have sought opportunities to build professional networks to facilitate and provide expertise in developing robust evaluations which relate to specific objectives. We will collectively evaluate the impact of this strategy in achieving our overall aim of preventing and reducing gambling-related harm in Wirral.

Delivery and governance

This strategy has been produced by an alliance of groups, services and organisations who are all connected to populations affected by gambling in Wirral. Our strategic partners have supported the design and delivery of this integrated strategy and action plan. Collaboratively, we will support people affected, and at risk of gambling, and in turn, have a positive impact on a range of other associated health and social challenges to the benefit of all partners.

This strategy will be delivered over a five-year period, which reflects the time involved in effectively planning, delivering and monitoring the progress made towards our strategic aims and objectives. A strategy action plan will support the implementation of this strategy, which will be framed around the key objectives and strategic priorities. The Gambling-Related Harms Steering Group will continue to meet monthly to review and discuss progress on the strategy. This will include representation from partners with responsibilities in the action plan. Regular updates of the strategy progress will be provided by the Public Health team to the Health and Wellbeing Board.





Acknowledgements

This strategy has been co-produced with partners, including the Wirral Gambling-Related Harms Steering Group – a multi-agency partnership of local authority teams, voluntary sector organisations, lived experience voices and regional experts. We would like to thank all partners and contributors for their insights, commitment, and shared determination to reduce gambling-related harms in Wirral.

The steering group remains committed to taking this work forward through ongoing collaboration, action planning and continuous learning – ensuring that our borough becomes a safer, healthier place where everyone is supported to thrive.

Document created 28 May 2025

