

News Release



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A 'SAFE' BET AS RITCHIE REVIEWS GAMBLING POLICY, PRACTICE & LAW

Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie MLA, today announced a high-level, strategic review of Northern Ireland gambling policy, practice and law.

The legislation dates back to 1985 and is not robust enough to deal with modern gambling.

Margaret Ritchie said: **“Current legislation is old, inflexible and hard to understand and the gambling market has moved on. There are new products and new ways of gambling that the current law never envisaged. It is in everyone’s interests that the gambling industry is regulated effectively which is why I am initiating this review.”**

My top priority in taking forward the review will be public safety. Close supervision of the industry is needed to achieve responsible regulation - keeping crime out of gambling, protecting the young & the vulnerable and ensuring fairness for the consumer. Our legacy should be the creation of an intelligent regulatory system that is seen to be fair.”

There is currently little hard evidence available on which to develop policy. A phased approach is therefore planned and will initially involve research, information-gathering and engagement with key interests, leading to publication of a discussion document. In stage two the responses will be analysed and a report produced for the Minister.

Margaret Ritchie continued: **“We need to have a mature, well-informed debate. My current priorities are to find out local people’s attitudes to gambling, the size and shape of the gambling market and the wider economic and social impacts of gambling. I will work closely with all interests to develop a package of balanced reforms. I wish to ensure that everyone in the community has the chance to comment and I encourage them to do so as part of this process.”**

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1 In Northern Ireland gambling (other than the National Lottery) is regulated under the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries & Amusements (NI) Order 1985 (“the 1985 Order”).
- 2 The 1985 Order is broadly modelled on much older GB law, now repealed and replaced by the Gambling Act 2005 which came fully into effect on 1 September 2007.
- 3 In broad terms the 1985 Order regulates betting on tracks and in bookmaking offices; gaming including the use, supply and maintenance of gaming machines and gaming in bingo clubs; small scale amusements with prizes; and lotteries.
- 4 Licensing of gambling activities falls to the courts, district councils and, for track betting licences, the Department. Enforcement lies with PSNI.
- 5 Key issues for the review will include:
 1. the general licensing system and associated fees & charges;
 2. enforcement;
 3. protection for young & vulnerable people and problem gambling;
 4. new and emerging forms of gambling, including remote gambling;
 5. known problems e.g. regulation of gaming machines.
- 6 News Media enquiries to DSD Information Office on 028 90829078/07970 976894. Out of office please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699715440 and your call will be returned.

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