



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01439

Name of petitioner

Jonathan McColl

Petition title

Betting and loan shops in deprived communities

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urgently review the correlation between the prevalence of betting shops and cheque cashing / pay day loan type shops on our high streets and in our communities, and high levels of poverty and deprivation and to use any evidence found in such a review to support the introduction of new planning powers for councils and other empowered authorities to refuse permission for premises of these types on the grounds of overprovision; when supported by robust statistical evidence of high levels of deprivation in communities to be served by such establishments.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Having been a member of West Dunbartonshire Council's Planning Committee for the past five years, I, along with the majority of other members of the Committee, have consistently tried to refuse permission for new premises to open in West Dunbartonshire. However, each time, without fail, appeals against our decisions are upheld as there are currently no grounds for refusal.

We have also attempted to amend the Local Plan to assist us in finding grounds for refusal but have been constrained by legislation and have been unable to implement any protections.

I have spoken to a number of MSPs from various political parties that I have met at events relating to my work as a Councillor over the past 5 years and was advised that since this issue requires a change in legislation, the best course of action would be to seek public support for this through the e-petitions system. I have waited for some time for the new system to be launched and now that it has I am following that advice.

Petition background information

I have found it extremely frustrating that relevant authorities cannot limit the number of these type of premises in our communities.

You will be aware that there are very specific grounds upon which a Planning Authority can refuse an application, for example, where a betting shop operator applies for a

change of use from a retail shop to a betting office (which is considered in planning terms as a 'dead frontage' as there are no retail sales taking place; and as such no goods for sale to be seen through the window), the only ground for refusal would be that it was reducing the 'vibrance and vitality' or 'amenity' of the community.

The Government Reporter consistently upholds appeals against refusal. While Councillors, Community Rep's and the Public find this extremely frustrating, it is not the fault of the Reporters' Office as their hands are tied by the lack of overprovision as a grounds for refusal.

As a result of this, our area is saturated with bookies and cheque centre type businesses. Dumbarton High Street is only 480m long. As well as various cash shops and competing betting companies operating, it has two betting shops from the same company at either end of the road.

Loan Shops aside, a campaign has been started in England to urge the Communities Minister to grant powers to refuse permission for betting shops to relevant authorities. The campaign, started by Cllr Rowenna Davis (Labour - Peckham) and is backed by the Grasp Group, has the support of MPs and Professionals. I have already contacted Cllr Davis and the Grasp Group and we have agreed to keep each other up to date with developments, including the progress of this petition. More information can be sourced from <http://www.grasp-group.org> and www.rowennadavis.com

The Licensing Board, with the full support of our local Licensing Forum has successfully implemented an overprovision policy using the powers of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. This model has been hailed as a huge success, receiving national acclaim from individuals and organisations including, Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill MSP, Strathclyde Police, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde and Alcohol Focus Scotland, and I see no reason why we cannot implement similar powers to help protect our communities from overprovision of betting and high interest loan shops.

Despite claims from Scottish Licensed Trade News, the Board have not used the policy as a 'blunt instrument' to refuse any and all applications. We have successfully rejected those applications, where the NHS and/or police have objected, we felt were not good for the area in terms of the Licensing Objectives.

More details can be obtained from the West Dunbartonshire Licensing Board & Forum websites at <http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/law-and-licensing/licensing/licensing-board> and <http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/law-and-licensing/licensing-forum> or direct from the clerk on 01389 737801

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/fightingpoverty>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

Comments to stimulate online discussion

The petition speaks for itself and I would welcome comments, questions and public debate on this issue.

I would like to make it clear that I am not anti-gambling. I have used my local betting shops and sometimes bet online on football matches.

But I recognise that problem gambling causes significant issues for individuals, families and communities, and the prevalence of betting shops, increasing availability of access, does not help people overcome their problems.

For those with the most serious problems, cash advance / pay day loan shops next door to betting shops do not help, and when people get into financial difficulties, the high interest, excessive charges and aggressive collection policies only exacerbate the problem.