

Local Area Review  
as part of the  
Gambling Statement of Principles  
2022-2025

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The Gambling Act 2005 (the Act) is the primary legislation governing gambling activity in Great Britain. It consolidated and updated previous gambling legislation and, following its full implementation in 2007, brought together the vast majority of commercial gambling into a single regulatory framework. As well as establishing a dedicated national regulator (the Gambling Commission), the Act gave local regulators broad discretion to manage local gambling provision.

The Act has three licensing objectives;

- Preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder, or being used to support crime
- Ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way
- Protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling

These objectives influence the way the Gambling Commission and licensing authorities perform their functions, and the way gambling businesses carry out their activities.

Under S.349 of the Act, licensing authorities are required to publish a statement of licensing principles, commonly known as a policy statement. This statement, typically valid for a three year period, sets out the local approach to regulation and ensures operators have sufficient awareness and understanding of the licensing authorities requirements. The Gambling Commission encourages licensing authorities to produce a policy statement reflective of local issues, in order to identify and reduce risk to the licensing objectives. To assist this process, it is recommended that authorities produce a local area profile<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.2 Aims and Limitations

This profile report aims to summarise existing national research relating to gambling related harm, and identify potential risks relating to vulnerable groups and/or geographical areas within Stevenage (see section 3.2 of this report for the list of groups). Data from various sources will be utilised to identify these risks, which should be considered throughout the application process. Findings should assist the local authority in meeting the licensing objectives and ensure specific needs of local communities are considered and vulnerable groups are protected.

Where groups have been identified as being 'at risk' of gambling related harm, datasets have been sought to explore their prevalence within Stevenage and/or Hertfordshire. In several areas, data could not be identified, or the data was not available at a local level. As a result, potential risks have not been explored. Where data could be identified, its currency could be questioned (e.g. the Census), or the data was not available at ward level.

## 2. The National Picture

The Gambling Commission’s national survey into gambling behaviour in 2020 shows that overall, 42% of adults (16+) said they had participated in at least one form of gambling in the previous four weeks. This represented a 5 percentage point decrease from the previous year (47% in 2019).

It is important to point out that the year to December 2020, which the data is based upon, is unique due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The various lockdown rules and restrictions throughout 2020 brought about significant consumer behavioural change and had a major impact on the gambling industry. Specifically:

- a decrease of in-person participation (down 9 percentage points to 26%) across football pools, bingo, betting on horse races, betting on other events and casino games
- an increase of online gambling participation to 24% (an increase of 3 percentage points)<sup>2</sup>.

In recognition of the impact of COVID-19 it is useful to provide pre-pandemic figures for comparison. (see Figure 1) which shows an overall decline in gambling participation rates since 2016.

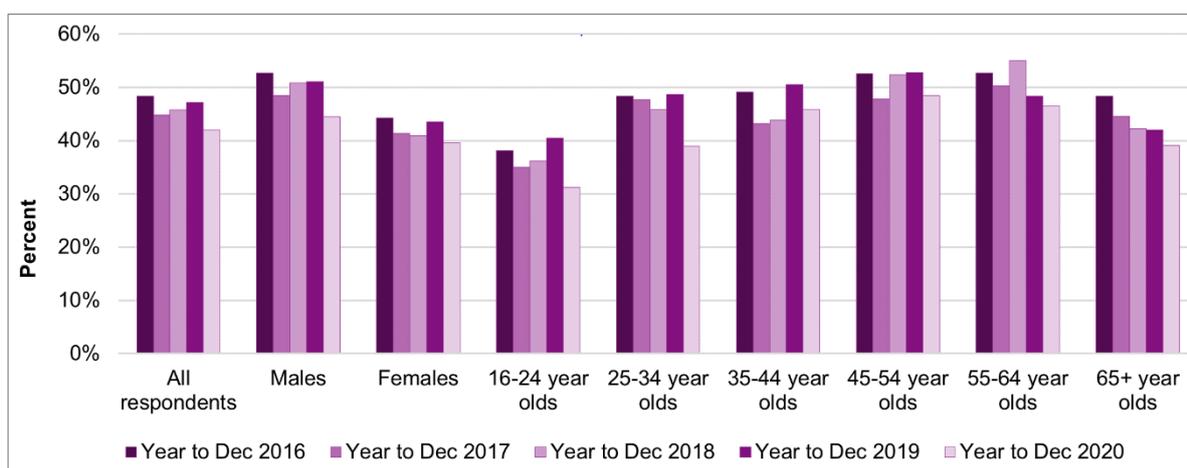


Fig. 1 – Gambling Behaviour 2016-2020 (Gambling Commission)

Despite a decline in numbers in recent years, the Gambling Commission reports that there were still more than 10,000 licensed gambling premises in Great Britain as of March 2020. By way of comparison, this is more than the number of stores (9,968) run by the eight largest supermarket chains in Britain (in terms of market share)<sup>3</sup>.

## 3. The Local Picture - Stevenage

Stevenage is 1 of 10 districts in the county of Hertfordshire in the East of England, and borders Greater London to the South, Cambridgeshire to the North, Essex to the East and Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire to the West.

Stevenage is an urban borough covering 25.96sq km, and represents 1.58% of the total land area of the county of Hertfordshire. The borough is made up of 13 wards and has direct borders with the neighbouring districts of North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire.

79% of residents (2017) in Stevenage are satisfied with the area as a place to live.

The latest (mid-2020) estimate from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) puts the population of Stevenage at 88,104 (44,476 males and 43,628 females).

The number of occupied households in Stevenage was 34,898 in 2011 with 58.3% of residents owning their own home compared to an average of 63.4% for England.

The mean age of Stevenage residents is 38 years old (39 years in England) based on figures from the 2011 census. In Stevenage, latest (mid-2020) estimates show that 15.5% of the population is aged 65 years and over and 2.4% of the population is aged 85 years or over.

### 3.1 Gambling Premises

Licensing authorities, as defined in Section 2 of the Act, are responsible for licensing gambling premises<sup>4</sup>. For the purpose of this profile, licences currently in force across the borough have been categorised in two ways; those relating to ‘high risk’ premises and those relating to ‘low risk’ premises.

High risk premises include gaming centres, betting shops, bingo halls and premises with more than two gaming machines and/or machines with higher stakes and pay-outs. Low risk premises include those with two or less low stake gaming machines and unlicensed family entertainment centres.

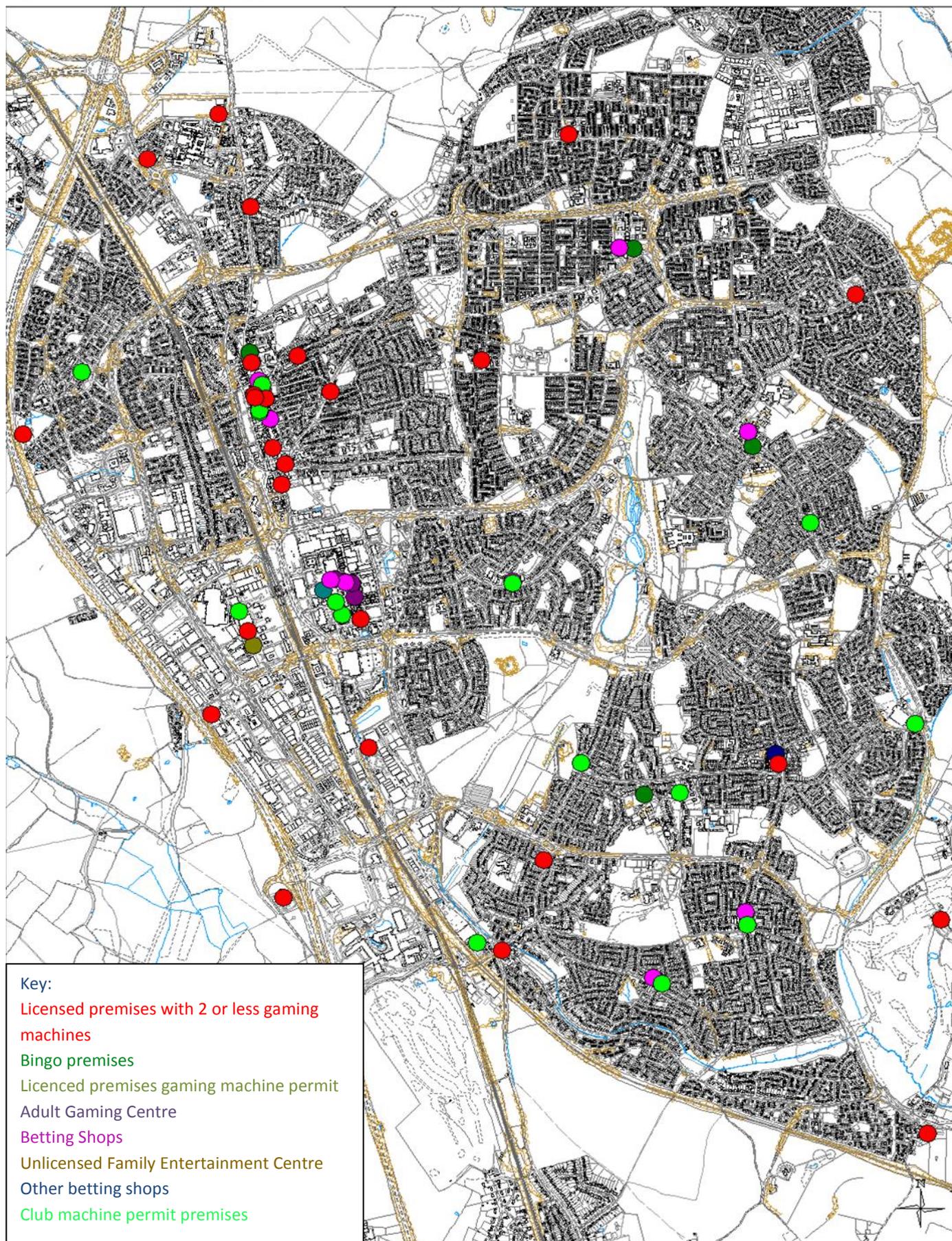
Nationally, gambling premises tend to be found in more urban areas, town centre locations or around coastal areas. Gambling venues also cluster in certain areas within towns and cities<sup>5</sup>. A report by the University of Bristol in 2021 also found that as of November 2020, 21% of gambling premises were based within the most deprived decile of areas in the country, compared to just 2% in the least deprived decile<sup>6</sup>.

In total, 86 gambling permissions are currently granted across Stevenage. Twenty-eight permissions are small lotteries, which are registrations by non-commercial societies. Figure 2 maps the licensed gambling premises in Stevenage (not including small lotteries). There is a concentration of licensed gambling premises in the Town Centre (Danestrete) and at the High Street.

In the main, participation in all gambling activities is predominately online, with exception of National Lottery and other lottery draws, bingo & football pools. (year to December 2019)<sup>7</sup>

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Figure 2: Licensed gambling premises in Stevenage



### 3.2 Problem Gambling and 'At Risk' Groups in Stevenage

Problem gambling is defined as 'gambling to a degree that compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal or recreational pursuits'<sup>8</sup>. In 2021, Public Health England published a review of the evidence on gambling harms. The report provided a comprehensive estimate of the economic burden of gambling on society to date; revealing that the harms associated with gambling cost at least £1.27 billion in 2019 to 2020 in England alone. This analysis includes the first estimate of the economic cost of suicide (£619.2 million) and provides an updated cost of homelessness associated with harmful gambling (£62.8 million)<sup>9</sup>.

In 2015-6, Geofutures' Gambling and Place Research Hub undertook research for Westminster and Manchester City Councils to explore the concept of area vulnerability to gambling related harm<sup>10</sup>.

The first phase of the research involved a detailed literature review aimed at identifying which groups in society are vulnerable to gambling related harm. The research found evidence to support suggestions that the following groups are more vulnerable:

- children, adolescents and young adults (including students)
- people with mental health issues, including those experiencing substance abuse issues (problem gambling is often 'co-morbid' with these substance addictions<sup>9</sup>)
- individuals from certain minority ethnic groups, such as Asian/Asian British, Black/ Black British and Chinese/other ethnicity
- the unemployed
- the homeless
- those with low intellectual functioning
- problem gamblers seeking treatment
- people with financially constrained circumstances
- those living in deprived areas.

In addition, the Gambling Act 2005 identifies children and vulnerable persons as requiring specific regulatory focus to prevent harm and exploitation. Vulnerability is likely to include; *"people who gamble more than they want to, people who gamble beyond their means and people who may not be able to make informed or balanced decisions about gambling due to, for example, mental health, a learning disability or substance misuse relating to alcohol or drugs"*<sup>11</sup>.

The remainder of this report will set out the local picture in Stevenage in terms of some of the vulnerable groups listed.

#### 3.2.1 Young People

Protecting children from being harmed or exploited by gambling is a licensing objective of the Act. There is also strong evidence that children, adolescents and young adults are vulnerable to the experience of gambling problems, or at risk of experiencing gambling problems<sup>10</sup>. Generally in the UK, the minimum legal age for gambling is 18. Exceptions to this include lotteries, scratch cards and football pools where the participant can be 16<sup>12</sup>.

In Stevenage, it is estimated that 8544 people, or 9.7% of the population, are aged 10 to 17<sup>13</sup>. When considering potential risks to young people, the location of the town's schools and colleges are of particular note. There are 47 education establishments across Stevenage serving all neighbourhoods. North Herts College offers higher education with 2 campuses in Stevenage, at Monkswood Way & Fulton Close. Secondary schools are located off the High Street (Greenside School, Barclay Academy & Thomas Alleyne Academy) and there are no schools in the Town Centre; although a future school is planned in the redevelopment of Stevenage Town Centre.

### **3.2.2 Those who are unemployed**

There is a consistent body of evidence showing those who are unemployed and who gamble are more likely to experience adverse outcomes from their gambling than those in paid employment<sup>10</sup>.

The percentage of the working population within Stevenage that were unemployed between July 2020 and June 2021 was 4.3% compared to 5.0% for the UK.

The percentage of all people of working age claiming Universal Credit in September 2021 was 5%, high than the East of England at 4.2% and the same as the all-UK figure of 5%.

Employment deprivation is one of the seven domains that comprise the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It measures the proportion of the working-age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market. The IMD is explored later in this profile.

A further consideration is the location of job centres as they are accessed by people who are likely to be unemployed, and considered to have a combination of very low income and large amount of personal disposable time. There is a Jobcentre Plus in Stevenage at The Forum, which serves the Borough population.

### **3.2.3 Those from certain ethnic backgrounds**

Surveys have shown a consistent relationship between problem gambling and at-risk gambling and ethnicity. In all studies, problem gambling prevalence rates were higher among those from non-White ethnic backgrounds<sup>10</sup>.

In the 2011 Census, 16.9% of the Stevenage population was from an ethnic minority background (defined as non-white British). 93.0% of Stevenage households had English as their main language, 3.2% of households had no member with English as a main language. Saint Nicholas ward has the highest percentage of non-white ethnic minorities in Stevenage at 20.8%, with Manor ward having the lowest at 9.2%.

### **3.2.4 Those living in deprived areas**

Evidence from a range of surveys has shown that those living in more deprived areas are more likely to experience problems with their gambling behaviour<sup>13</sup>. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England, and ranks every small area from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived). These small areas are Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). The IMD combines information from the following seven domains to produce an overall relative measure;

- Income Deprivation
- Employment Deprivation
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation

- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Living Environment Deprivation

According to the 2019 English Index of Multiple Deprivation, Stevenage continues to be the most deprived authority in Hertfordshire, increasing its deprivation score by 5.8% and has dropped in the national ranking of lower tier authorities by 16 places.

Of the ten most deprived neighbourhoods in the county, two are in Stevenage - Bedwell now the second most deprived in the county, up from third in 2015, and Bandle Hill the eighth most deprived, down from sixth in 2015. Bedwell and Martins Wood are the fourth and third most deprived LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas) in Stevenage. The map in Figure 3 has been colour coded to display the decile the neighbourhood falls into nationally (dark blue indicating relatively more deprived and pale green indicating relatively less deprived). Bedwell ward incorporates the Town Centre and Leisure Park, which together have a large concentration of licensed gambling premises.

The greatest contributors to the increase in deprivation between 2015 and 2019 across the town are health, crime, traffic accidents and housing affordability. Across Stevenage, whilst overall deprivation has increased, inequality across the town has decreased as a result of the least deprived areas performing poorly. Stevenage neighbourhoods have the greatest inequality in income and crime incidents, and least inequality in education and health.

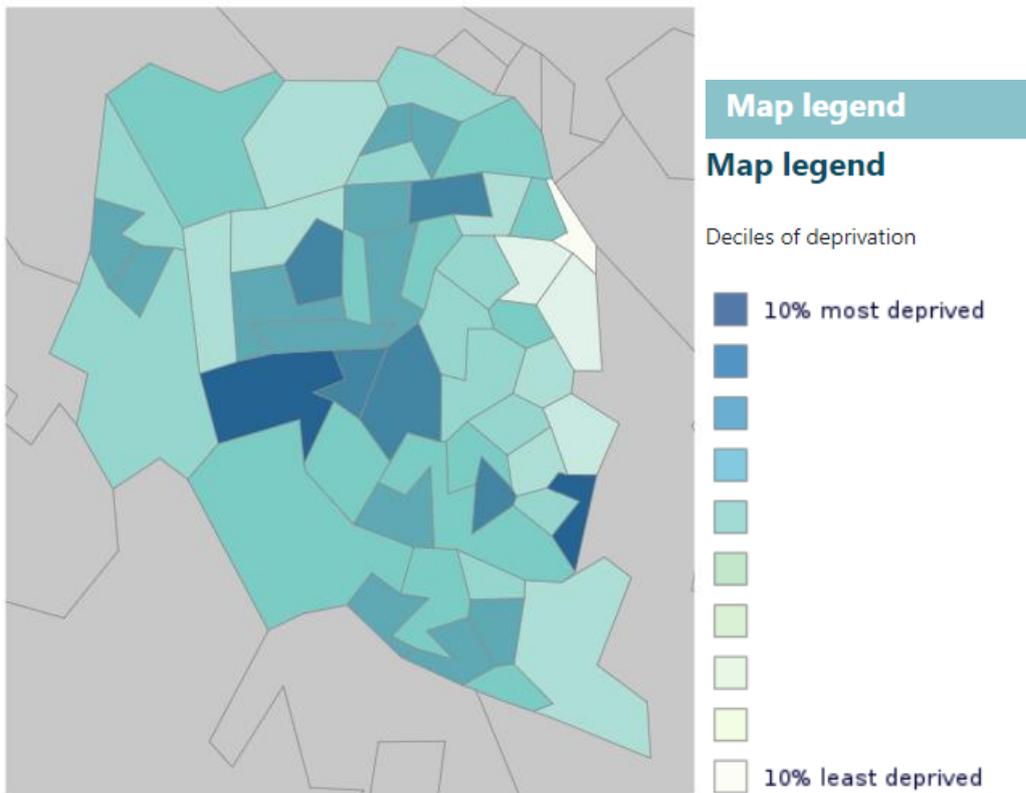


Fig. 3 Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019 Interactive Dashboard (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)

A further objective of the Act is preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder, or being used to support crime. Figure 4 shows the number of reported crimes in Hertfordshire between Nov 2021 and October 2021<sup>14</sup>. Stevenage and Dacorum have consistently reported more crime than other areas in the county. Unfortunately it has not been possible as part of this report to provide evidence of the links between local crime in Stevenage and gambling.

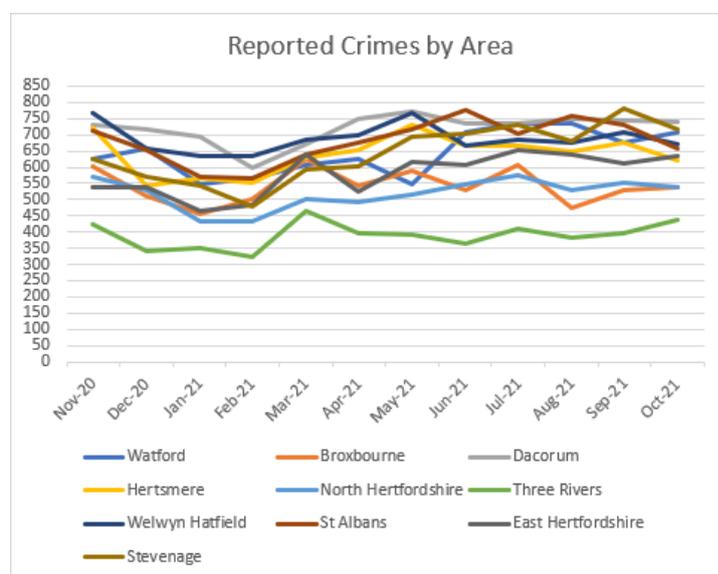


Fig. 4 Crime Rates in Hertfordshire (Jan – Dec 2021)

### 3.2.5 Those with substance abuse/misuse issues and existing problem gamblers

According to the latest Health Survey figures (England 2018), 2.7% of adults were considered low-risk gamblers, and a further 0.8% were classed as moderate-risk gamblers. Low-risk gamblers experience a low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences. For moderate-risk; gamblers who experience a moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences. The data shows that 0.5% of respondents were classified as problem gamblers (gamblers who gamble with negative consequences and a possible loss of control). This is stable compared to the 2016 England figure (0.7%).

There are two clinics/treatment centres for addiction in Stevenage; on Bessemer Drive (Alcohol clinic) and Norton Road (Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service). Both are outside of the Town Centre, sited within the Borough’s industrial area.

It is not possible to identify how many people living in Stevenage have substance abuse problems and if any links can be established with existing problem gamblers. It is possible however to identify the number of Stevenage residents per 100,000 of the population of Hertfordshire who have died as an outcome of drug misuse between 2015 and 2019. Figure 5 shows that in 2017-19 Stevenage had a slightly lower number of deaths per 100,000 (4) compared with the rest of England (4.7)<sup>15</sup>.

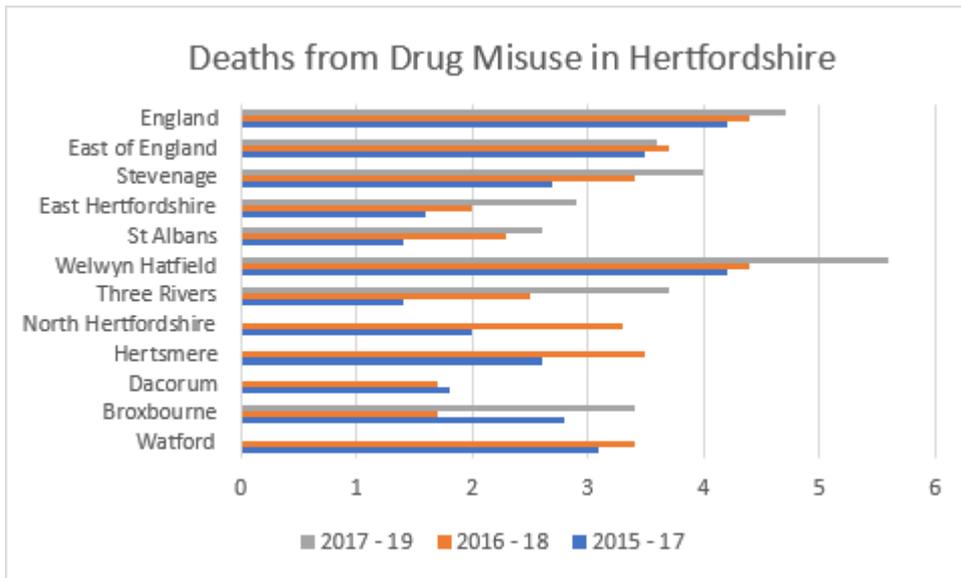


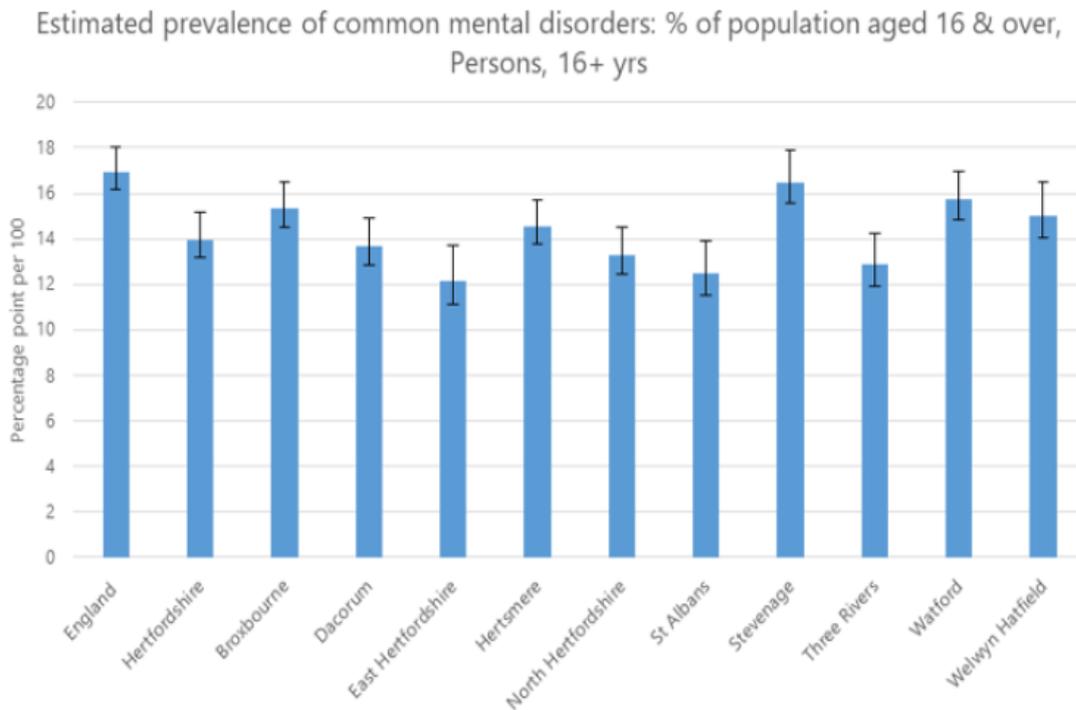
Fig. 5 – Deaths from Drug Misuse in Hertfordshire 2015 - 2019

### 3.2.6 Those with poor mental health

There is a consistent body of evidence demonstrating a strong association between gambling problems and many mental health conditions. This suggests that those with Common Mental Disorders (CMD), substance use/abuse problems, psychoses and other conditions have higher rates of problem or at-risk gambling than those without these conditions<sup>10</sup>.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Adults<sup>16</sup> published by Hertfordshire County Council in June 2021 indicates that mental disorders represent the second largest single cause of disability in the UK across all ages, with 1 in 4 adults experiencing at least one diagnosable mental health problem each year. Half of all mental health conditions begin before the age of 14, with three-quarters established by 24 years of age.

Figure 6 shows the prevalence of common mental health disorders across Hertfordshire before the COVID-19 pandemic. Common mental health disorders (CMDs) include: depression, generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Stevenage was the only district with a statistically significantly higher prevalence of CMDs than Hertfordshire overall. Stevenage, Watford, Welwyn Hatfield and Broxbourne were statistically similar to England, whereas all other districts were significantly lower.



#### 4. Conclusion

The provision of licenced gambling premises in Stevenage borough is concentrated in the Town Centre, Leisure Park and High Street; this is to be expected as a natural part of the leisure facilities offered by a town. In the neighbourhoods, there is prevalence for betting shops, licenced clubs and premises with gaming machines in each hub area. Most clubs and premises have less than two gaming machines on site.

The town centre and Leisure Park are situated in Bedwell ward, identified as greatest area of deprivation within Stevenage. The main inequalities leading to deprivation are income and crime.

As a licensing authority, Stevenage Borough Council is not aware that harms from gambling are significant in Stevenage and the objectives of the Gambling Commission are not being upheld.

This review has been constructive to outline where gambling harms can be realised.

As such, the Licensing Authority intends to prioritise evaluating premises in the Town Centre to ensure we are content that the licensed gambling premises are meeting the Gambling Commissions operating licence conditions and social responsibility code.

The volume of licensed gambling premises within the Town Centre has been static over the recent years. In 2020 a betting shop was licensed on Queensway and in 2021, an unlicensed family entertainment centre was licensed by the Licensing Authority on the Leisure Park.

Licensed gambling operators in the town centre and on the Leisure Park will be required to produce/review their risk assessment when certain triggers are met. These are,

- New premises application

- Variation of the premises licence
- Significant changes in local circumstances

The Gambling Commission, as part of its current public health strategy, recognises that working collaboratively with Public Health colleagues can assist in developing a true picture of actual and future gambling harms within a Council area. The Licensing Authority intends to collaborate further with Public Health colleagues to understand the local issues and introduce local controls in response, where required. This will be valuable partnership working as Stevenage town centre is being developed to increase the numbers of residents living in the town centre.

## 5. References & Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/for-licensing-authorities/GLA/Part-1-General-guidance-on-the-role-and-responsibilities-of-licensing-authorities-in-gambling-regulation>
- <sup>2</sup> [Gambling Behaviour in 2020: Findings from the quarterly telephone survey \(Gambling Commission\)](#)
- <sup>3</sup> Analysis of data from Geolytix shows that the combined total number of stores owned by Tesco, the Co-operative Group, Sainsburys, Aldi, Lidl, Asda, Morrisons and Waitrose in the UK in Nov 2020 was 9,968. These are the eight largest supermarket chains based on market share (collectively accounting for 92% of the overall market share at the time).
- <sup>4</sup> [http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/for-licensing-authorities/GLA/Part-4-Licensing-authorities.aspx#DynamicJumpMenuManager\\_1\\_Anchor\\_1](http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/for-licensing-authorities/GLA/Part-4-Licensing-authorities.aspx#DynamicJumpMenuManager_1_Anchor_1)
- <sup>5</sup> Exploring area-based vulnerability to gambling-related harm [2015]
- <sup>6</sup> [The Geography of Gambling Premises in Britain \(2021\)](#)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://assets.ctfassets.net/j16ev64qyf6l/7ulxjm1SNQMygdOFV2bzxN/ea74db1104925f015edb11db0596f98b/Gambling-participation-in-2019-behaviour-awareness-and-attitudes.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> [Gambling Behaviour in 2020: Findings for the quarterly telephone survey \(Gambling Commission\)](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Gambling related Harms evidence review – Public Health England \(2021\)](#)
- <sup>10</sup> Exploring area-based vulnerability to gambling-related harm [2015]
- <sup>11</sup> ONS Mid-2016 Population Estimates for 2016 Wards in England and Wales
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.begambleaware.org/understanding-gambling/how-is-gambling-regulated>
- <sup>13</sup> ONS Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland via [ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk) accessed 8/12/21
- <sup>13</sup> [The Geography of Gambling Premises in Britain \(2020\)](#)
- <sup>14</sup> Herts Insights – Crime Rates in Hertfordshire to date (Nov – 2020 – Oct 2021)
- <sup>15</sup> Public Health Outcomes Framework (Indicator C19d)
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/jsna/jsna-documents/mental-health-adults.pdf>