



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Communities

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements  
(Amendment) Bill:  
Northern Ireland Sports Forum

7 December 2021



the full extent of problem gambling may be best placed to comment on policy issues such as gambling machines, opening hours of bookmakers etc. The Northern Ireland Sports Forum supports comments that the IFA has made about a levy and its potential use for the grassroots development of sport and physical activity.

We all recognise that sports have a strong track record of community-based fundraising activities and that they try to be innovative in their approach to them. Unfortunately, it is recognised that the legislation surrounding fundraising is outdated and restrictive for sports organisations, and the Sports Forum and its members — you heard from two of them this morning — welcome this review.

On the amendment to societies' lotteries, we do not envisage any objections to the reform of those lotteries, as they are often seen as fundraising as opposed to gambling. Those supporting their local clubs and sports organisations do not associate buying a raffle ticket with gambling. Rather, they see it as supporting a good cause. Many sports clubs run a weekly lottery at £1 a ticket, and that is vital income for them. The ability to sell those tickets online from September was well overdue but welcome. We thank the Minister for that.

For fundraising raffles, the £1 limit on ticket prices is restrictive and cumbersome. The cost of maintaining and developing capital facilities or sports programmes can range from small amounts to hundreds of thousands of pounds. Although fundraising at that level can be very difficult, sports enthusiasts see supporting their local clubs through purchasing tickets as fundraising rather than as a gambling opportunity. Sports clubs are well placed within their communities to cap the price of raffle tickets and the total value of ticket sales according to the particular needs of the club at that time. The suggestions that you heard this morning from Brian and Ulster GAA are quite reasonable.

Sports clubs in Northern Ireland are at a disadvantage compared with their counterparts in GB when it comes to the restrictions placed on them: the caps on the price of tickets and the income from prizes. Many organisations here are governed on an all-Ireland basis, and there is greater flexibility of fundraising opportunities in the South, such as in the purchase of tickets and a significantly higher level of capital funding for sports clubs' development, which, again, places our clubs at a disadvantage. We welcome the steps taken by the Minister to date, but we urge further support for the voluntary and community sector to be implemented as soon as possible.

The Bill has no provision to update the rules for other types of lottery, namely private lotteries and small lotteries at exempt entertainments. It would be a missed opportunity not to update the rules, either by secondary legislation or within the Bill. The rules on private lotteries do not permit ticket sales of more than £1,000, and tickets must be sold on the premises. The ticket cap of £1,000 could be increased to a level of around £10,000, which would be a useful form of fundraising for sports organisations that have their own premises. An example of that is the half-time draw at a sports event. Reduced attendances as a consequence of the COVID pandemic and the requirement that private lottery ticket sales must be made on the premises mean that it is difficult, at times, to run a private lottery. Private lotteries should therefore be permitted to sell tickets by electronic means to those who normally frequent an event or game but who may not always be able to do so.

Again, tickets for small lotteries at exempt entertainments are permitted to be sold only on the premises where the entertainment takes place and during that entertainment. We recommend that the words "on the premises" be removed from article 133(2)(b) of the 1985 Order to allow small lotteries at exempt entertainments to happen online. We also question why raffle tickets are not permitted to be sold prior to the event and ask that that prohibition be removed, as, in practice, many organisations sell raffle tickets — indeed, any type of ticket — prior to the event, and they do so for a price that may be over £1 without knowing that they should not.

We would also like to comment on clause 11, which deals with prize competitions not requiring persons to pay to participate. While free prize draws are used by commercial organisations, they are also of interest to some sports organisations. The Northern Ireland Sports Forum is unsure, however, about whether article 168 of the 1985 Order also applies to sports, charities and fundraising appeals, as article 168(1) refers to prize competitions being conducted in:

*"any newspaper, or in connection with any trade or business".*

A recent trend in local fundraising is the crowdfunding concept. Sport NI is crowdfunding for Project Re:Boot, which is part of the Supporting Sport to Build Back Better programme. Crowdfunding is an online vehicle whereby people donate to a good cause in their community, such as fundraising development, coaching programmes and well-being initiatives. For Project Re:Boot, 50% of the total

fund is being matched by Sport NI. A club may want to reward any donors with a free prize draw as a thank you for making a donation to its crowdfunding campaign. Providing an opportunity to reward donors who take part in a raffle for a club polo shirt or a ticket for a game as a thank you for supporting a fundraising activity should not be seen as a gambling exercise, given the small tokenistic nature of the prizes offered through, using the same example, crowdfunding.

Finally, we believe that the introduction of a regulatory body, which has been suggested, should be considered. We also support the comments from others about the need for the ongoing review of legislation to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. We believe that there is a role for a regulatory body. Again, I thank the Committee for this opportunity, and I am happy to take any questions.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** Thank you very much, Ciaran. That was another very good presentation, and it gives rise to more questions. I do not know whether that is a good or a bad thing. The £1 issue concerns me a bit. I say that as an individual member of the Committee. The legislation will last, as the Order has done, for a long time. The value of £1 today is very different from what it was 10 years ago or what it will be in 10 years' time, so my concern is about that value. As for how we protect people from gambling, should we remove the cap or put in place a higher cap?

**Mr Kearney:** I think that a higher cap should be put in place. Most activities involve £1, £5, £10 or £20 draws. There may an opportunity, as Brian mentioned earlier, to run a monthly £10 draw, so the cap would be £120. A lot of those fundraising activities happen once in a generation for a very large capital project that may cost hundreds of thousands of pounds or, potentially, even more. Those are not everyday activities, and not every sports club or organisation has the capacity to sell tickets at that level or to engage with their community. I am aware of the engagement and interest in sport among Committee members who are in the room or online. They are aware of the type of grassroots clubs and organisations that are involved and that their size and scale differ. What suits a taekwondo or judo club will be very different from what suits a GAA, football, rugby, hockey or golf club. In sport, it is not a case of one size fits all, but an upper limit on a ticket price of, say, £120 or £150 would be reasonable. A prize fund limit of £400,000, as an example of what was mentioned earlier, would be reasonable.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** I bought a brick to help to develop a local GAA club. When I purchased that brick, the club put my dad's name up on a wall, which he was delighted with. As you say, though, that was a once-in-a-lifetime investment in something that was good for the community.

We have covered the £1 issue, and you are happy enough with a regulatory body. How do you feel about a lottery being reported to, for instance, the police seven days in advance?

**Mr Kearney:** I could sit here and say that that is what happens all the time. We are all aware, however, that not every sports organisation is aware of the need to do that. If every sports organisation and club at grassroots level were to follow that regulation, the police would have very little time to do other things.

A regulatory body could help and support clubs. It could communicate to them what should be done, perhaps through a code of practice for organisations such as the Sports Forum, governing bodies and other organisations. That engagement could establish the necessary practice.

As somebody who sits on a representative body, my view is that sports organisations, from grassroots to national level, are well regulated by their governing bodies. They are used to meeting certain standards in, for example, safeguarding, integrity, gambling and anti-doping. If a regulatory body provided more confidence to its stakeholders and members, sports clubs would understand that.

It would be a case of how often it was necessary to communicate with the police. As Brian said, having to report a Christmas bazaar would be a bit cumbersome.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** Do you think that a regulatory body could provide advice to sporting organisations to ensure that they uphold and abide by the rules?

**Mr Kearney:** I think so. The Northern Ireland Sports Forum engages heavily with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). I have spoken to NICVA about these issues for a number of years. It and other community and voluntary sector organisations are able to provide advice, guidance and support, and to promote any information or codes of practice required by any regulatory body.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** No member is indicating that they have a question.

Would any sporting bodies involved with the Northern Ireland Sports Forum have difficulties if gambling advertising revenue were to be removed?

**Mr Kearney:** That is one of those things on which it is hard to have an agreed approach. You heard from two sporting bodies earlier this morning. There is a level of advertising in football. If you recall, Kellie, we had a discussion about this at an all-party group meeting. Even among the MLAs in the room, we could not get an agreed approach.

Gambling sponsorship involves only a minority of our members. We have 75 sports governing bodies, and, for the vast majority of those, gambling does not come into their way of thinking. Patrick and Sean outlined their approach, and other bodies will have that same line of thinking, but some may have the same approach as Ulster GAA. It would be difficult to get a unified approach to that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** Thank you very much for that, Ciaran, and for your presentation. It has helped the Committee to think more about the content of the Bill.

**Mr Kearney:** Thank you, Chair and Committee members.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Armstrong):** Good luck in your new job.

**Mr Kearney:** Thank you.