



# MPs who opposed risk checks on gamblers received £279k from industry

EXCLUSIVE

Bereaved families say tougher rules are needed to prevent gambling-related suicides, and they urge MPs not to be swayed by 'gambling lobby freebies'



Left to right, John Spellar, Matt Hancock and Sir Philip Davies are among MPs who criticised proposed affordability checks

By Alexa Phillips

June 3, 2024 6:00 am (Updated 2:13 pm)

MPs who have opposed **tougher gambling regulations** have received a total of £279,000 in earnings, donations and hospitality from the betting and horseracing industries since 2019, **i** can reveal.

The MPs, who received gifts including hospitality tickets to Ascot, Cheltenham, Lord's Cricket Ground, Wembley Stadium and the Brit Awards, were critical of the Government's proposals for financial risk checks for **gamblers**.

The donations were all publicly declared in the MPs' register of members' interests. **i** also examined Hansard (transcripts of parliamentary debates) and news reports in its analysis.

NEWSLETTER



## The Essential

A curated daily round-up of news, culture, sport and more. (Mon-Sun)

Sign up

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply. Your information will be used in line with our [Privacy Policy](#)



**News** [UK](#) [World](#) [Scotland](#) [Health](#) [Education](#) [Technology](#) [Science](#) [Environment](#) [Business](#)

gambling and horseracing industries have repeatedly argued that the checks must be introduced.

The White Paper is intended to update the 2005 Gambling Act, introduced by Tony Blair's Labour government.

MPs who received donations raised concerns that the checks would make things worse for **people with gambling addictions** who would turn to an unregulated black market instead.

They denied that the funds from the gambling and horseracing industries had any influence on their views.

#### Read Next



**NEWS**

**EXCLUSIVE** **UK's biggest gambling addiction charity accused of 'promoting' gambling by campaigners**

[Read More](#)

The Government proposed in its White Paper that net losses of £125 within a 30-day period or £500 within a year would trigger financial risk checks.

Enhanced checks, informed mainly by credit referencing data, were suggested for losses greater than £1,000 within a 24-hour period or £2,000 within 90 days.

The Gambling Commission announced changes to the plans in May, saying a first tier of checks would be phased in – to make it easier for gambling firms to introduce them – at a threshold of £500 of losses within a month from August, dropping down to £150 of losses from February 2025.

The industry watchdog said the second tier of checks would be explored in a pilot scheme and may not be implemented.

If the Conservatives remain in power, then the changes mentioned in the White Paper are likely to continue. Labour has not set out its plans for the gambling industry but it is not expected to scrap any of the paper's proposed changes.

MPs who received contributions from gambling firms and the horseracing industry, which is largely funded by **betting**, urged the gambling minister to change the plans as recently as February of this year.

Charles Ritchie, chair of Gambling with Lives, a charity that supports families bereaved by gambling-related suicide, warned that greater controls on gambling are needed to protect lives.

Mr Ritchie, whose **son Jack took his own life after developing a gambling addiction**, said: "Behind every regulation that a paid-for MP has helped water down are gambling suicides, and families devastated.

"Bereaved families are calling on MPs and candidates to resist the gambling lobby freebies – the public is desperate for purer politics."

Former Conservative leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith told **i** the gambling industry has "misrepresented" the issue and the checks were needed to protect financially vulnerable people, who are often encouraged to keep gambling by industry operators.



**News** UK World Scotland Health Education Technology Science Environment Business

...thing that they always say is, if somehow someone had just said, 'Pause, stop. What are you doing?' They've said, 'we may never have ended up where we were.'"

A debate was held in the Commons after a horseracing industry-led petition calling for the checks to be axed was signed by more than 100,000 people.

Some bookmakers have already implemented their own version of the affordability checks by asking people for pay slips and personal details.

The Government said these checks were much more "onerous" than what was being proposed, but campaigners said the industry used them to "drum up pushback" against the proposals.



The Ritchies co-founded the charity Gambling with Lives following the death of their son Jack at the age of 24 (Photo: Ritchie family)

Entain, the owner of high street betting shops Ladbrokes and Coral, gave contributions worth £74,000 to some of the MPs, the register of members' interests shows.

Another £128,600 came from the Betting and Gaming Council trade body, £7,400 from Paddy Power and Betfair's owner Flutter Entertainment and its subsidiaries, and £1,600 from William Hill.

Laurence Robertson, the Conservative candidate for Tewkesbury, received the largest amount of funding from the gambling and horseracing industries, at £109,000.



**News** [UK](#) [World](#) [Scotland](#) [Health](#) [Education](#) [Technology](#) [Science](#) [Environment](#) [Business](#)

He has enjoyed tickets and hospitality at Cheltenham, Ascot, the cricket at Lord's and the Brit Awards courtesy of the Betting and Gaming Council, William Hill and Flutter Entertainment. The trade body also held a reception for his birthday last year.

Speaking about the proposed affordability checks in February, he described them as the “greatest ever threat” to the “existence” of gambling and horseracing.

In August 2023, Mr Robertson told the *Racing Post* he would speak to gambling minister Stuart Andrew to outline these concerns.

**Former health secretary Matt Hancock** voiced his opposition to the plans in February, saying: “We are making a mistake, so we must stop.”

Mr Hancock, the outgoing MP for West Suffolk, received donations of £20,000 from Tattersalls, a top auctioneer of race horses, in 2019.

A spokesperson for Mr Hancock said that “as the MP representing Newmarket”, he is “proud to have both stood up for the horseracing industry and to have brought in some of the toughest anti-gambling measures in the UK – including the Fixed Odds Betting Terminal limits”.

He added: “Matt has never taken a penny from the gambling industry and to suggest otherwise is completely untrue. He has explained his nuanced position on affordability checks very clearly.”

### Top 10 companies making contributions to the MPs

Betting and Gaming Council	£128,656
Entain (owns Coral & Ladbrokes)	£73,995
Tattersalls	£20,000
The Jockey Club	£15,629
Racecourse Association	£8,420
Flutter Entertainment & Hestview (own Paddy Power & Sky Bet)	£7,400
Arena Racing Company	£4,179
Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club	£4,025
Power Leisure Bookmakers	£3,922
Gamesys	£3,074

Contributions registered since December 13 2019

Source: Register of Members' Interests



**News** UK World Scotland Health Education Technology Science Environment Business

Sir Philip was paid £49,980 in 2020 by Entain - previously known as GVC Holdings - for "providing advice on responsible gambling and customer service".

He said the checks "are likely to make things worse for people with a gambling addiction" by pushing them to engage in an unregulated black market.

He claimed: "It is unacceptable that the Government, the Gambling Commission and the bookmakers will basically, between them, decide how much each individual punter can afford to spend on their betting and the punter gets virtually no say whatsoever."

The industry has claimed that tougher regulations would encourage people to gamble illegally, where there are no protections at all - but the Gambling Commission said the threat has been "overstated", estimates about its prevalence do not have a strong evidence base and it is "very difficult for illegal operators to get access to the UK market".

### Read Next



#### NEWS

**EXCLUSIVE** Sainsbury's and Asda among supermarkets funding lobbying against vape ban

[Read More](#)

John Spellar, the outgoing Labour MP for Warley, received £3,600 in tickets to the cricket at Lord's, an England cricket match, and an England game at Wembley from the Betting and Gaming Council and Power Leisure Bookmakers from 2021 to 2022.

He wrote an op-ed for *PoliticsHome* in January 2023 in which he said "imposing blanket affordability checks at very low levels" will "only fuel the growth of the lucrative and unregulated black market".

Mr Spellar, a former transport, defence and Northern Ireland minister, added: "We cannot have this uncertainty for such a large and successful industry going forward."

Stephanie Peacock, Labour's shadow gambling minister, received a ticket and hospitality to the Doncaster Races from the Arena Racing Company and a hospitality box ticket for the League One Play Off Final from the Betting and Gaming Council last year.

Speaking in the Commons in February, she said she had recently hosted a roundtable with representatives from the racing sector to hear about the "unintended consequences" of the checks.

She said industry losses because of affordability checks "could lead to lower prize money, decreasing participation, job losses in the rural economy and an overall decline in the sport".

A spokesperson for Stephanie Peacock said she was participating in the debates in her capacity as the shadow gambling minister, responding from the Labour front bench.

Sir John Whittingdale, a former gambling minister, was paid £6,000 to make a speech at the Betting and Gaming Council's annual meeting in January 2022.



At the event, he said some proposals for affordability checks were "extraordinary", according to the *Racing Post*.

**Betting and Gaming Council**  
@BetGameCouncil · Follow

✕

The rescheduled BGC AGM will take place on Thursday at The Savoy Hotel in London, and we are delighted to announce that former Culture Secretary, and ex-gambling minister, John Whittingdale will deliver an address as guest of honour.

8:00 AM · Jan 18, 2022 ⓘ

---

♥ 3
 💬 Reply
 🔗 Copy link

Read 1 reply

Sir John, the Conservative candidate for Maldon, reportedly also flagged concerns around the black market, and said: "If you make it too hard for people, or put too many burdens on people who want to gamble in a safe way and who can afford to do so, then they will resent that and there is a risk they will look elsewhere. The danger of driving people towards the black market is a real one and needs to be borne in mind."

The Betting and Gaming Council paid for Ascot tickets and hospitality worth nearly £5,000 later that year. Earlier this year the trade body treated him to a trip to the Dublin Racing Festival, spending £1,290 on his tickets, flights and accommodation. He has also received tickets from the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club.

Chris Grayling, a former transport and justice secretary, received £1,900 in tickets to the Epsom Derby.

The outgoing Conservative MP said there were "genuine problems around things like online casinos", but told the gambling minister that "tackling those must not come at the expense of the racing industry, which is so important to so many communities across the country".

He added: "The impact on the trainers of measures that really damage the industry would be enormous."

In a statement, Mr Grayling said he has spent the last 23 years as MP for Epsom and "in that capacity they invite me to attend the Epsom Derby each year which is what this entry refers to".



**News** UK World Scotland Health Education Technology Science Environment Business

Member of Parliament	Total	Company	Contribution type
<b>Laurence Robertson</b>	<b>£109,178</b>		
	£81,325	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>earnings, entry &amp; hospitality</i>
	£8,796	<b>The Jockey Club</b>	<i>entry &amp; hospitality</i>
	£4,357	<b>Entain</b>	<i>entry &amp; hospitality</i>
	£4,000	<b>Racecourse Association</b>	<i>passes</i>
	£3,450	<b>Hestview (owned by Flutter Entertainment)</b>	<i>entry &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,650	<b>Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club</b>	<i>entry, accommodation &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,614	<b>Ascot Racecourse</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,600	<b>William Hill</b>	<i>hospitality</i>
	£1,250	<b>Sports Information Services</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£636	<b>Arena Racing Corporation</b>	<i>hospitality</i>
	£500	<b>Flutter Entertainment</b>	<i>hospitality</i>
<b>Sir Philip Davies</b>	<b>£73,178</b>		
	£57,087	<b>Entain</b>	<i>earnings, tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£5,935	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£3,094	<b>Arena Racing Company</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,700	<b>Flutter Entertainment</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,537	<b>Gamesys</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,000	<b>Starsports</b>	<i>tickets</i>
	£1,000	<b>Merkur Gaming UK</b>	<i>earnings</i>
	£750	<b>Normandie Stud</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£575	<b>Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club</b>	<i>festival entry, hospitality &amp; accommodation</i>
	£500	<b>Racecourse Media Group</b>	<i>tickets</i>
<b>Matt Hancock</b>	<b>£20,000</b>		
	£20,000	<b>Tattersalls</b>	<i>donations</i>
<b>Conor McGinn</b>	<b>£18,947</b>		
	£7,814	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>tickets, hospitality, flights &amp; accommodation</i>
	£5,833	<b>The Jockey Club</b>	<i>earnings &amp; passes</i>
	£4,420	<b>Racecourse Association</b>	<i>passes</i>
	£880	<b>Entain</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Craig Whittaker</b>	<b>£14,214</b>		
	£10,407	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>earnings, tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£3,457	<b>Entain</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£350	<b>Flutter Entertainment</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Sir John Whittingdale</b>	<b>£14,052</b>		
	£12,252	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>earnings, tickets, hospitality, flights and accommodation</i>
	£1,800	<b>Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club</b>	<i>tickets, hospitality and accommodation</i>
<b>Mark Jenkinson</b>	<b>£9,737</b>		
	£6,280	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£3,457	<b>Entain</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Aaron Bell</b>	<b>£9,283</b>		
	£3,457	<b>Entain</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£2,328	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>tickets &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,961	<b>Power Leisure Bookmakers</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,537	<b>Gamesys</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Caroline Nokes</b>	<b>£3,700</b>		



**News** [UK](#) [World](#) [Scotland](#) [Health](#) [Education](#) [Technology](#) [Science](#) [Environment](#) [Business](#)

MP	Amount	Source	Details
<b>John Spellar</b>	<b>£3,678</b>		
	£1,961	<b>Power Leisure Bookmakers</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
	£1,717	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>tickers &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Chris Grayling</b>	<b>£1,900</b>		
	£1,900	<b>Epsom Downs Racecourse</b>	<i>passes &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Stephanie Peacock</b>	<b>£1,047</b>		
	£598	<b>Betting and Gaming Council</b>	<i>hospitality box ticket</i>
	£449	<b>Arena Racing Company</b>	<i>ticket &amp; hospitality</i>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£278,914</b>		

Source: Register of Members' Interests, Electoral Commission, TheyWorkForYou

Rose Zussman, senior policy manager at campaign organisation Transparency International UK, said MPs should "work only for their constituents and not as de facto **lobbyists** for corporate interests", calling for donations to be capped.

"When MPs accept large sums of money from gambling, horseracing or other industries while backing their attempts to water down reforms in the chamber, this raises legitimate questions as to who our politicians are really working for," she said.

"To prevent the inherent conflict of interest between a large donor's priorities and an MP's duty to act in the public interest, we need common sense reform of the **political finance** rules."

The other MPs did not respond to a request for comment.

A spokesperson for the Betting and Gaming Council said: "In constituencies across the country BGC members support the jobs of 110,000 people – on hard-pressed high streets through betting shops, in hospitality and tourism via casinos and bingo, as well as a large and growing number of tech jobs in the online sector.

"Any hospitality is consistent with the parliamentary rules and is fully declared and transparent".

[alexa.phillips@inews.co.uk](mailto:alexa.phillips@inews.co.uk)

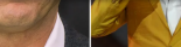
Topics

[Betting](#) / [Gambling](#) / [Horse Racing](#) / [Lobbying](#) / [MPs](#)

## Most Read By Subscribers



News UK World Scotland Health Education Technology Science Environment Business



LIFESTYLE

I'm a palliative doctor - my mother's death made my mind up over assisted dying

○ Live: Diane Abbott voices fear vulnerable people will be 'swept up' within assisted dying

POLITICS

Great British Railways fiasco with only 15 staff and nationalisation months away

POLITICS

Ending PIP cash could help solve Labour's £3bn welfare cuts conundrum

NEWS

Former My Chemical Romance drummer Bob Bryar 'found dead at home'

Essentials

- News
- Sport
- Lifestyle
- Culture
- Opinion
- Puzzles

Useful links

- Contact Us
- About
- Advertise
- i Print Subscriptions
- iRewards
- i app
- i Student Digital Subscription
- Sitemap
- Newsletters
- Saved Articles
- Manage account

Follow us on



All rights reserved. © 2024 Associated Newspapers Limited.

Cookie Settings Do not sell or share my personal information Terms and Conditions Privacy Policy