



By Email

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Secretary of State,

Sustaining Economic Recovery - Impact of potential curfews on the UK Casino Sector

As discussions about curfews on a national, regional and local basis continues we wanted to write to you to warn of the huge negative financial impact that such moves would have on the casino industry.

Thanks to the excellent work of your Department, together with Public Health England, the official guidance that accompanied the recent reopening of the casino sector ensured that casinos are amongst the safest and most covid-secure businesses in the UK.

However, the impact of the extended lockdown on the sector has been severe and we continue to do everything possible to protect the jobs of our 14,000 employees across the UK. To ensure the sector's survival it is vital that any additional covid social distancing measures, such as curfews, are not imposed on businesses that have demonstrated that they are covid-secure and do not cater for the age group targeted by the measure.

The introduction of a blanket measure such as curfews would certainly result in many thousands of redundancies in a very short timeframe. It is no exaggeration to state that it would devastate the UK land-based casino sector:

While some of our members are making progress in gradually welcoming customers back, attendance at casinos in the UK varies between 5% and 60% of pre-covid levels. This fragile return of business is also heavily reliant on trade after 10pm. 50%-70% of UK land-based casino income is generated after this time. This is a very different trading profile to other parts of the economy and within the hospitality sector itself – pubs and restaurants would not face the same impact. In this reality it is self-evident that our businesses would effectively be forced to close again under a curfew regime.

The other critical factor that must be taken into account is the age profile of a casino customer. A typical visitor to a casino is 48 years of age. Groups of young adults do not tend to gather in casinos to drink after 10pm. Furthermore we would take measures to actively discourage it.

The conclusion to draw is that the impact of a casino curfew on covid numbers would be negligible but the impact on our businesses would be catastrophic.

The casino sector adheres to the most stringent of covid-secure measures including limits on capacity, perspex screens, sanitisation equipment and sophisticated track and trace systems. Indeed, during a visit from Public Health England and the Department for Health and Social Care in July, operators were reassured that casinos were not 'higher risk' and that the measures in place were excellent.

As a sector we support the need to act swiftly to protect public health. However, this must and can be done smartly in a way that protects the public and the gradual economic recovery. Protecting members of the public who enter our venues is the fundamental building block of our operations:

- Our businesses are designed to cater for individuals, couples and small groups of people
- Through the intelligent use of our membership systems casinos are able to track and trace customers with the highest degree of accuracy and certainty
- With full customer-experience covid secure systems we are able to provide unrivalled protection for customers and staff alike

Further, we commend the Government on the furlough scheme. It has worked as it was designed to. Thousands of jobs in our sector that otherwise would have gone have undoubtedly been saved for the time being. The reality is that some sectors of the economy, including casinos, are encountering a very gradual rebuilding of business, however like other leisure and hospitality businesses, we would urge the Government to extend the furlough scheme or introduce similar targeted support to help retain jobs as this support is critical for the next few months as businesses attempt to recover.

In summary since reopening, UK casinos have been able to protect customers and staff. We have achieved this through providing safe and secure operations. However, curfews will have a hugely detrimental impact on casinos.

We ask for your help to ensure that our businesses can remain open and able to trade. We in turn will continue to act as trusted partners with central and local government to ensure that our businesses remain the safest and most secure environments.

Given the nature of this cross-departmental discussion, we are copying this letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for BEIS, the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

With kind regards and thanks for all your support so far,

Michael Dugher
Chief Executive
BGC

Paul Wilcock
Chief Executive and BGC Casino Group Chair
Genting UK plc.