

6.11 POKIES FREE HAWTHORN FOOTBALL CLUB

Submitting Councillors: Crs Fergeus, Lake and James

MOTION

That Council:

- i) *Congratulates the Melbourne Football Club on their plan to withdraw the club from any financial interests attached to the gaming industry;*
- ii) *Notes the long relationship between the Hawthorn Football Club and the City of Monash;*
- iii) *Notes that venues associated with the Hawthorn Football Club were responsible for more pokies losses than any other AFL Club in the 2016-17 financial year¹, topping \$23.9 million;*
- iv) *Notes that \$10.86 million of pokies losses occurred at the Hawthorn Football Club gaming venue Vegas at Waverley Gardens in the 2016-17 financial year; and*
- v) *Calls on the Hawthorn Football Club to follow the example of the Melbourne Football Club and withdraw the club from any financial interests attached to the gaming industry.*

BACKGROUND

On 4 April 2018, Melbourne Football Club announced that it had taken action to completely remove itself from the gaming industry. This included the sale of one of its venues within the City of Monash, the Leighoak Hotel located in Oakleigh. This leaves only one other venue owned by an AFL Club operating Electronic Gaming Machines within our municipality; Vegas at Waverley Gardens, owned by Hawthorn Football Club.

Of the 16 venues currently owned by Victorian AFL Clubs, the two venues with the highest rate of user losses are both owned by Hawthorn Football Club, with Vegas at Waverley Gardens ranked second, with \$10.86 million lost in 2016/17.

DISCUSSION

City of Monash is frequently recognised as state leaders in the prevention of gambling-harm because of our history in successful advocacy and project work in the community. In line with Council's *Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020* and ongoing leadership in this space, Monash has a firm commitment to the prevention of gambling harm normalisation. If Hawthorn Football Club were to follow the lead of other AFL clubs in exiting the gaming machine industry, the potential non-renewal of their gaming entitlements at Vegas at Waverley Gardens venue could save the local community millions of dollars in potential losses through those EGM's. As such, Monash Council would strongly advocate for the Club to take this step.

¹ http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/afl_fact_sheet

Hawthorn Football Club have already made a commitment to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundations ‘Love The Game’ program. This involves pledging a commitment to reduce exposure of their fans and members to sports betting. To compliment Hawthorn Football Club’s terrific work with the indigenous community and in Mental Health, through partnerships with Epic Good Foundation and Beyond Blue, being aware of the harm associated from Poker Machines should be made clear. The impact of Poker Machines on Mental Health² and our local multi-cultural³ community is well documented, and any continued relationship with the gaming industry undermines other community outreach work.

Currently clubs operating poker machines pay a reduced rate of tax compared to hotels if they can show that 8.33% of the venue's poker machine revenue was spent on approved community benefits. While community contributions made by the Club are supposed to counterbalance the harm caused by the venue, currently claiming the operating costs of the venue can be listed as a community benefit. Vegas at Waverley Gardens claimed \$754,543 in operating costs for 2016/17, which compromises 70.40% of their overall community benefit claim. If you factor out the operating costs, the rest of their listed community benefits claimed only compromise 2.89% of total losses.

Given that the Club have made a clear commitment to harm-minimisation and reducing gambling normalisation through their pledge to the ‘Love the Game’ program, City of Monash now calls on Hawthorn Football Club to take this pledge another step further in reducing the exposure to all forms of harmful gambling.

CONCLUSION

City of Monash has a duty of care to its residents to advocate for Hawthorn Football Club to follow the lead of North Melbourne Football Club and Melbourne Football Club and withdraw any of their financial interests that are involved in the gaming industry. Monash Council has made a commitment to limiting gambling-related harm, through the *City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020*.

Furthermore, City of Monash has included gambling-harm prevention as a focus within the key priorities outlined within the newly endorsed *A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021*. Currently Hawthorn Football Club operate both of the highest-loss venues that are owned by Victorian AFL clubs, one of which operates within our municipality and targets the most vulnerable members of our community.

Council is best positioned to effectively advocate for the improved health and wellbeing of our community. A commitment from Hawthorn Football Club to withdraw from the gaming industry would send a powerful, positive message to both its members and the local community around the harmful impacts of gambling and EGM's. A strong stance taken by the Hawthorn Football Club to distance themselves from the gaming industry will lead to increased opportunities for better health outcomes for all Monash residents, as well as the broader football community.

² https://www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/12944/problem-gambling-and-depression-beyond-blue.pdf

³ <https://www.insidegambling.com.au/editions/7/feature/gambling-in-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities-in-australia>