

Community's recent launch of a demand for new safety standards in betting shops comes at a time when increasing numbers of workers are being assaulted, threatened and abused.

Union demands safer working for betting shop staff

Workers in the nation's 8,500 betting shops are suffering more and more violence and abuse – both verbal and physical. Some have faced robberies and been threatened or even harmed with weapons including knives, crowbars and shotguns. Between 2005 and 2007, armed robberies in London betting shops leapt by 43 per cent, while in Glasgow assaults and robberies rose by 200 per cent. A high percentage of betting shop employees are women and, in thousands of shops, workers often have to work alone, which Community believes constitutes a safety and security risk.

Due to employers not taking appropriate action to curb these attacks, employees increasingly believe that dealing with rising levels of abuse and thefts is 'all part and parcel of the job'. That's why so many shop managers, along with their staff, have joined Community.

'The complacency of the betting shop owners is staggering,' said one worker who has been in the industry for almost 21 years. 'All too often bookmakers say the managers are responsible, yet they give them little or no training and don't maintain staff levels. They ought to be alarmed at the increasing number of robberies, thefts and assaults. I sometimes wonder if they are even aware of the amount of abuse and anti-social behaviour staff have to cope with on a daily basis.'

'It is a very serious situation and can't be allowed to continue,' said Community General Secretary Michael Leahy, 'With our union representing betting shop staff nationally, and with more joining every month, we are determined to do something about it. We

need to see minimum safety standards adopted everywhere, better staff training, and to see the employers made accountable for what is going on. We have the resources, the officers, the structure, but we can't solve this serious problem alone. That's why we are pressing the government to take action.'

Community is asking the government to adopt Minimum Safety Standards for betting shops, which the union has drawn up in consultation with industry workers. These standards will be launched in London in January and the key points call for:

- no lone workers in a betting shop.
- safe mechanisms for banking and cash in transit.
- thorough reporting and recording of assaults, thefts and anti-social behaviour.
- CCTV, maglocks and panic alarms in every shop, with appropriate lighting.
- posters warning against anti-social behaviour in every shop.
- staff training to deal with conflict resolution.
- new, tighter, risk assessment as shops stay open later.
- more power for councils to intervene and act against unscrupulous operators and those not addressing anti-social behaviour.
- independent assessment of the effects of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) on problem gambling and anti-social behaviour.

Community is also calling on the Government to convene a forum of both employers and the union to address the question of increasing violence.

There are early signs that the Government will respond favourably to Community's appeal. At a House of Commons meeting in October, leading MP Ian McCartney said that he was sure that Community's call for a better deal for betting shop workers would be heeded.

In Scotland, great progress is being made, with many Members of the Scottish Parliament joining with Community and its betting shop members to demand action. A meeting has already taken place with First Minister Alex Salmond who has also backed the campaign following activity in the Scottish Parliament.

Things are improving for staff in the UK's betting shops as Community recruits more members and trains more activists, but there is still much to do. And the launch of the Minimum Safety Standards document in Parliament and a further launch in London early in the new year will be important steps forward in securing safer workplaces for our members in the betting industry sector.



General Secretary Michael Leahy with Community members launches Community's minimum standards for betting shop workers



Members of the Scottish Parliament support Community's poster campaign (above)