

Cross-Party Group for Horseracing: Meeting Minutes – 21st November 2023 – 12-1pm

Venue: Conference Room A, Ty Hywel.

Members: Llyr Gruffydd MS (Plaid Cymru – Chair), Alun Davies MS (Labour), James Evans MS (Conservative), Joel James MS (Conservative)

External: Jack Barton (British Horseracing Authority – Secretariat), Henry Dixon-Clegg (BHA – Secretariat)

Apologies: Samuel Kurtz MS (Conservative), Jack Sargant MS (Conservative)

Meeting start time: 12:10pm

Jack opened the meeting with a review of activity in 2023.

Point to Points – Five Point-to-Point meets are scheduled for early 2024 in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. This reflects the fact that Point-to-Point racing in Wales has not recovered to pre-Covid levels. One main issue is farmers not giving permission to use their land due to the insurance implications. James Evans said he would pass on a contact for NFU to Jack. Insurance is proving to be a problem across the industry, particularly for some training yards, with insurers dropping out of the market and premiums increasing. Jack said that the BHA would try and get a list of which insurers Welsh trainers use.

Jobs, Education and Training – Jack asked members of the group to continue to send details of agricultural colleges and educational institutions in their constituencies that provide equine based courses. He also mentioned that the RMF Group based in Solihull has started to offer equine care diplomas, following on from a discussion that the group dinner in September that Wales and the West of England tended to have less training and education opportunities available. Alun Davies mentioned that Gwent College provides good equine courses and suggested that it could be beneficial for them to link up with RMF.

Alun said that he would like to see education and training, as well as growth for the three courses in Wales, as the two main focuses for 2024. Jack replied that he agreed with these aims, and that the creation of a Welsh Racing brand is in the hands of the racecourses currently and the BHA can only encourage them to move the project along rather than do the work.

Equine welfare – Jack mentioned the thoroughbred census (part of the wider Horse Welfare Strategy) and said that he planned to flag this to Minister Lesley Griffiths to see if we could secure a Ministerial social media post about it and encourage better take up from Welsh thoroughbred owners. It was agreed that the BHA would be draft a response on behalf of the group to a letter from a member of the public about equine welfare to all group members. Alun raised a drop in event at the Senedd hosted by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), which was sponsored by Joel James. He said that GBGB were telling Members that welfare standards in greyhound racing and horseracing are similar. The BHA did speak to GBGB about the greyhound racing debate earlier this year, but have had limited engagement since.

AGM – Llyr Gruffydd thanked the BHA for its support and said that 2023 had been a good year for the group. James Evans nominated Llyr to continue as Chair, which Alun Davies seconded. Llyr Gruffydd therefore continues as Chair of the CPG. Henry Dixon-Clegg will be the new Secretary,

although Jack Barton will also still be assisting with secretariat duties and will continue to support the group.

MAC – Henry reminded everyone of the fact that British racing faces a shortfall of around 2,500 workers and that the BHA – with assistance from other industry bodies – applied for six racing roles to be added to the Shortage Occupation List (SOL). Since the CPG in September, the Migration Advisory Committee has recommended that all six roles be added to the SOL. The Home Secretary must now approve the recommendations, with a decision expected at some point early in the new year. Robert Jenrick MP, Minister of State for Immigration visited a stud in constituency last week to hear about racing's case for the inclusion of the six roles on the SOL. It was agreed that the BHA would draft a letter for the CPG members to sign and send to the Home Secretary, asking him to approve the MAC's recommendations.

Gambling Act Review – Henry said that the BHA submitted a response to the Gambling Commission's consultation on financial risk checks (commonly known as affordability checks) for remote bettors on 18th October. The submission outlined the BHA's opposition to blanket affordability checks, especially when the technology for fully frictionless checks is not available yet. The cost to the industry if the checks are implemented in their current form is estimated to be a £250 million drop in funding over five years. The BHA also strongly opposes the use of bettors' job titles or postcodes being used to determine whether or not they are 'at risk' of gambling related harm.

A survey just under 15,000 racing fans and bettors conducted by the industry found that 26% of bettors have already been subject to an affordability check and that 52% said they would bet significantly less or not at all if affordability checks were formally introduced. A distinct danger is that if they are implemented as currently written, affordability checks will drive bettors to the black market, where there are no safer gambling tools available and no regulation. This is backed up by the survey results: 9% of respondents have already used a black-market bookmaker, with 40% saying they would consider doing so if checks are introduced by law.

Off the back of the survey, a UK Parliament petition was launched under the name of Nevin Truesdale, CEO of the Jockey Club, which calls on the UK Government to reconsider the implementation of affordability checks. The petition is close to 90,000 signatures, but only around 3,000 of these have come from people in Wales. It was agreed that the Plaid Cymru and Labour members present would consider promoting the petition on their social media.

Levy – Jack reported that senior racing reps continue to be active discussions with betting around the Levy review and that the BHA will continue to keep members up to date on racing's statutory funding.

2024 meetings – Jack proposed maintaining the current structure of three more formal meetings and one event (e.g. dinner or yard visit). James Evans suggested holding a CPG meeting in conjunction with attending a race day at Bangor-on-Dee racecourse to try and encourage more members to attend. Jack and Henry said they would try and see if there was a suitable day to do this next year.