

Bookmakers Liaison Committee Meeting

IRM Executives and Racecourse Management (Catterick, Redcar, Thirsk and Wetherby) with On-course Bookmaker Representatives

Venue – Thirsk Racecourse

Date of Meeting – 29 January 2025

Attendees (IRM Racecourse Management Group)

James Sanderson (CEO Catterick and Thirsk)

JonJo Sanderson (Chief Executive Wetherby)

Amy Fair (General Manager Redcar)

Erin Boswell (General Commercial Manager Thirsk)

Michelle Campbell (General Manager Wetherby)

Stephen Skillern (Operations Manager Catterick and Thirsk)

Emma Binnion (General Commercial Manager Catterick)

Bookmaker Representatives

Richard Johnson

Christopher Hudson

Joe Huddleston

Paul Garrity

Jayne Robinson

Racecourse Betting Compliance Representative

Mark Ryan

Minutes of Meeting

- 1.** CH presented the group with an update following the RBC Technical Sub- committee meeting which took place on 29th November 2024. Of the twelve main minute points resulting from the meeting and referred to by CH the following two matters were discussed in detail.
 - The group was surprised that some bookmakers believed betting slips had a finite 'life'. The BLC members agreed with the decision made at the meeting of the RBC Technical Sub-committee that there was no set time limit on the 'life' of a betting slip. Irrespective of the date on which a bet was placed, and provided that a betting-slip issued by a bookmaker had not been defaced and was legible, or the bookmaker could provide absolute proof that the bet had already been paid, on presentation of the slip the bookmaker who had issued the slip must make payment of any return due to the holder of the slip.
 - Following concerns discussed at the RBC Technical Sib-committee meeting regarding possible data communication issues which could be due to some on-course bookmakers using Starlink technology to transmit data, it was agreed that the monitoring process recommended by the RBC Technical Sub-committee be followed at IRM racecourses with MR (or any other Betting Ring Manager in attendance at an

IRM group racecourse) being responsible for submitting a daily report on their usage and any issues arising.

- 2.** The matter of the positioning of bookmakers operating in the family enclosure at Thirsk racecourse was discussed. It was agreed that bookmakers should continue to pitch-up in a single line on off days, and that the line should start either side of the large gap on the front line, with the number attending split evenly each side of the gap replicating the arrangement in the centre course at York racecourse. It was pointed out that this format created four corners along the line and made the family enclosure bookmakers more visible and accessible to customers located around the gap. In addition, the single line format also gave Tattersalls customers opportunity to use family enclosure bookmakers.

It was agreed that any Betting Ring Manager in attendance at Thirsk should implement this layout in the forthcoming season.

- 3.** The matter of bookmaker parking in the family enclosure at Thirsk racecourse on off days was discussed. A request was made on behalf of bookmakers with picks in the family enclosure that, rather than driving on to the course via the family enclosure gate and paying the full vehicle occupancy fee, bookmakers with less than full vehicle occupancy be allowed to park in a non-racegoer parking area, such as an unused coach park. Bookmakers would then walk onto the course with their equipment and pay the single-entry fee along with their betting badge fee, thereby reducing the cost of betting on a low-attendance day. IRM declined this request insisting that bookmakers intending to stand in the family enclosure were required to drive on to the racecourse and pay the fixed fee applicable to all vehicles irrespective of occupancy. They insisted that this rule would be applied without exception.
- 4.** A bookmaker had asked that the matter of the siting of three bookmakers in the Woolpack new betting area be raised on his behalf at the liaison committee meeting. He requested that Thirsk racecourse management move the bookmakers sited in the Woolpack new betting area to a position at the other end of the paddock.

This request was declined by Thirsk management on the basis that the Woolpack new betting area was introduced to specifically service customers located in the new bars and facilities at the far end of the paddock. It was also thought that re-siting the bookmakers in a position nearer the Rails and Tattersalls enclosures would have a negative impact on the business of bookmakers already operating in those areas.

- 5.** The bookmaker who had suggested moving the bookmakers in the Woolpack new betting area also asked that the matter of allocating pitches in the new betting area be raised. He requested that it be pointed out that Thirsk racecourse management had failed to adopt the policy used at other racecourses whereby a process allowing a bookmaker to occupy more than one pitch in a new betting area was common practice. He suggested that the same process should be followed at Thirsk.

IRM pointed out to the liaison committee that their approach is different to that adopted at other racecourses, or by other racecourse groups. The IRM view is that by allowing a bookmaker, despite the fact they may hold multiple picks at a racecourse, to occupy only one pitch in any new area they were encouraging competition between bookmakers, which they regarded as of benefit to punters. They confirmed to the liaison committee that their intention is to use the new area policy in place at Thirsk at all racecourses within the group.

- 6.** A bookmaker representative brought to the attention of the liaison committee that the front-line positions 21,23,24,25 & 26 at Wetherby had no anchorage points, thereby making the use of those betting positions unsafe, which constituted a health and safety issue. It was agreed that SK would investigate this matter with a view to rectifying the problem.
- 7.** The matter of customer access to cash on-course was discussed. Bookmaker representatives asked if IRM group racecourses in their advertising would promote the fact punters can bet with cash and card when placing a bet with on-course bookmakers.

The matter of providing cash machines on-course for use by customers was also raised by bookmaker representatives. IRM management made it known that when cash machines were available at racecourses within the group, they were vastly underused. Therefore, given the associated costs of siting cash machines on-course there were no plans to re-introduce cash machines at any of the racecourses within the group.

It was pointed out that customers at Thirsk racecourse could make the short trip over the road to and use the local supermarket cash points should they require cash. The fact that some bookmakers, and the Tote, offered limited cash-back facilities was also noted and the IRM position was that this gave customers ample opportunity to access cash.

- 8.** Bookmaker representatives raised the matter of very poor midweek attendances at some racecourses and asked if there were any plans to try and attract larger crowds by introducing initiatives such as two-for-one entry or perhaps plans to attract older customers on off-days (who were maybe put-off by large crowds) by offering discounts/free entry etc.

JS suggested that the group was open to considering most ideas relevant to increasing attendances, however, free entry to racecourses was not an option. He confided that the group had a marketing team working on the project of increasing attendances. It was also pointed-out that attendance at Thirsk in 2024, no doubt helped by favourable weather conditions, had been good.

9. The subject of annual marketing fees (AMF's) paid by on-course bookmakers was discussed. JJS assured bookmakers that their AMF's were being used on various initiatives to increase attendances, such as minibus hire to transport racegoers to racecourses. He also pointed out that some racecourses within the group were not increasing entrance fees for racegoers and because AMF's were linked to entry fees they weren't increasing either, although the groups marketing costs were. He asked if bookmakers would be prepared to contribute more to fund marketing provided the additional funds were used on initiatives designed to increase attendances.

10. AOB

- CH thanked MC for her support for bookmakers at Wetherby racecourse by continuing to schedule a race in the name of on-course bookmakers.
- RJ asked if, rather than using temporary joints, the rail could become a permanent structure at Catterick racecourse. The request was noted although it was made clear that there were currently no plans to introduce a permanent rails structure.
- The question of bookmakers purchasing members badges was raised. IRM representatives stated that they had no problem with the purchase of members badges on the proviso that they couldn't be used by bookmakers against the cost of buying bookmaker betting badges or used to discount entry fees.
- The meeting was informed by IRM that the group had acquired planning permission for an all-weather course at Catterick racecourse. Although the introduction of all-weather racing was some way off it was intended that, should the development plans come to fruition, national hunt racing would continue alongside all-weather racing