

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE LGH-16-02

Date: Wednesday 13 November 2002

Title: LGH-15-02 (p. 3) Substance Misuse Policy

### **Purpose**

1. At the meeting of the Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2002 the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities agreed to provide a paper to the Committee on substance misuse policy in the autumn.

### **Summary**

2. This paper outlines how the Minister proposes to deal with the problems of substance misuse in Wales.

### **Background**

#### Context

3. The Assembly's substance misuse strategy, *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach*, was launched in April 2000. The strategy covers illegal drugs, alcohol, prescription and over-the-counter medication, and volatile substances. It has four key aims which focus on:
  - *Preventing children, young people and adults from misusing substances;*
  - *Protecting families and communities from the problems associated with substance misuse;*
  - *Increasing the availability of effective treatment;*
  - *Stifling the availability of illegal drugs and inappropriate availability of other drugs.*
1. The Minister's view is that the most critical shortfall relates to the availability of treatment services. The main priority in the short run will be to improve the availability of treatment.

## **Improving the availability of Treatment**

2. Treatment can work: -
  - a. people can be helped to give up their dependency;
  - b. current availability of treatment in Wales is patchy;
  - c. important to make treatment available promptly;
  - d. research indicates that money spent on treatment reduces crime.

## **New Funding for Treatment**

3. Research undertaken has highlighted stark variations in treatment provision between areas in Wales. In some areas there are long waiting lists that clearly act as a deterrent to those who are seeking help. In addition, preliminary research indicates that there has been a significant increase in problematic substance misusers in Wales since 1996.
4. To deal with these issues the Minister announced significant, incremental increases in the amount of money available for treatment services for the next three years.
5. The NHS is currently spending around £12.0 million a year on treatment for substance misusers, however, the spending varies across Wales and does not necessarily fit with demand. This Minister has already announced that this element of NHS funding will be ring-fenced and these changes will be made in the Supplementary Budget.
6. In relation to the Drug and Alcohol Initiatives budget which currently stands at £3.4 million, the Minister has already announced an additional £3.0 million for next year, £6.0 million for 2004-2005 and £9.0 million for 2005-2006.
7. For next year, this additional funding will allow us to set up the equivalent of an additional 5 Community Drug and Alcohol Teams across Wales. This means more community psychiatric nurses, support staff and GP prescribing time for substitute medication. This should allow over 1,000 more people to access Community Detoxification services – this area will then expand in the following two years in line with the increase in funding.
8. The Minister will also be looking at the availability and demand of bed spaces for residential detoxification and rehabilitation treatment and addressing any shortages.

9. There is clear evidence, reinforced by the Social Exclusion Unit report "Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners" which was published last May to show that those people who are able to access accommodation on their release from jail and are also given other support are far less likely to re-offend. In the draft budget, the Minister announced increases in provision for the housing budget. It is intending that some of these additional resources will be used to provide "half way house" accommodation for prisoners on release from jail, with particular regard to those with substance misuse problems.
10. The increases the Minister announced for the Drug and Alcohol Initiatives Budget will also be used to provide support for prisoners with substance misuse problems on their release from prison. Many prisoners who have been successful in kicking their habit whilst in jail, soon slip back into old habits on release, because of the lack of follow up support and end up on an endless cycle of reoffending. It is therefore intending to provide local support workers to target this group in each of the new DAAT areas. Further support within the prisons will also be provided.
11. To assist the Community Safety Partnerships with the cost of developing new statutory local substance misuse plans, they will each receive a one-off payment of £20k next year.
12. These measures are only the start. The increase in treatment services will be carefully planned and increased incrementally to allow capacity to develop in line with available resources. The Minister wants to ensure that this new money is targeted where it is most effective.

### **Other funding initiatives.**

13. The Final Budget includes an allocation of £11.2 million over the next 3 years for a new **Safer Communities Fund**. The money will address the underlying causes of crime and where appropriate, work with the police to tackle criminality itself. Funding will support a Task Force established by the Southern Wales police forces to combat the influx of Class A drugs into the regions as well as providing a source of funding for local partnerships to access for safer communities work. This funding will build on that announced by the Home Office for the Task Force.
14. In addition, the Home Office's '**Communities Against Drugs**' (**CADs**) scheme targets drug related crime and the disruption of drugs markets in communities. Over £2.78 million is coming to Wales in 2002-03 (the same level as last year) and is shared between all the Community Safety Partnerships but it is weighted in favour of those with the highest social deprivation problems. The projects being funded include: community wardens; CCTV; education packages; youth outreach workers; improved street lighting

and covert police operations.

## **New Organisational Arrangements**

15. Members are referred to the letter they received from the Minister on 16 October 2002 setting out the results of the recent public consultation on the future structure of Drug and Alcohol Action Teams.

## **The Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse**

16. The Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse was established in 2001 to provide independent professional advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on matters relating to substance misuse in Wales.
17. The panel is chaired by Richard Pates, Clinical Psychologist. The panel consists of experts from a number of fields – health, covering general practice, pharmacists and the voluntary sector; criminal justice, including police, prison and probation services; education; local authorities and DAATs and is attended by officials of the Welsh Assembly Government.
18. An Advisory Panel of individuals expert in their discipline is essential in helping to deliver the refocused strategy by being a source of expert advice and promoting and disseminating best practice. The Minister has recently met with Mr Pates and agreed with him that they will meet on a quarterly basis. The Welsh Assembly Government is determined to have the best possible advice available to fight the menace of substance misuse to Welsh Communities.

## **Action for the Committee**

19. The Committee is invited to note the contents of this paper and use it as a focus for discussion.

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