

Cross-Party Group Minutes

Meeting Minutes:

Cross Party Group Title:	Substance misuse and addiction
Date of Meeting:	07.06.2022
Location:	Seminar Rooms 1 & 2, Pierhead Building, Cardiff

In attendance:

Name:	Title:
Peredur Owen Griffiths MS/AS	Plaid Cymru Member of Senedd for South Wales East
Dr Altaf Hussain MS	Welsh Conservative MS South Wales West
Martin Blakebrough	CEO, Kaleidoscope
Gareth Llewellyn	Staff Cymorth Yr Aelod
Cris Watkins	Campaigns & Communications Officer, Kaleidoscope
Sector Wide CPG Distribution List	

Summary of Meeting:

Opening remarks and formalities

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Cross Party Group on Substance Misuse and Addiction to explore the question 'Can Wales Police it's way out of the drugs crisis?'

Peredur extended his thanks to the speakers for coming to share their personal experiences, which are key to policy making in this area. He emphasised the importance of hearing best practice in Wales, the UK and beyond.

'We need a frank conversation about one of the biggest issues that is facing our society.'

Peredur emphasised another key part of this CPG exploring best practice and hear about experiences in Wales, the UK and beyond. Having guests with first-hand knowledge of the Portuguese approach is particularly of interest given their experience in having an integrated care centre as part of their programme in that country.

Peredur ended his welcome by thanking Martin Blakebrough for Kaleidoscope's role in providing secretariat support and encouraged participants to visit the specialist



ambulance Overdose Prevention Centre parked outside the Pierhead Building to see the service it can provide.

Kaleidoscope CEO Martin Blakebrough addressed the meeting and encouraged all participants to ensure they take this opportunity to have an open conversation. Martin also encouraged participants to watch at Cullen Mais's interview on YouTube with First Minister Mark Drakeford on Drug Consumption rooms and the journey Cullen takes Mark on. It shows how we can move this debate forward at a political level. It is also important to move the debate forward with the public, and it has been encouraging having the Overdose Prevention ambulance on display to the public to prompt informed discussion. 'It is also the average member of the public who votes who we need to engage with'.

This event asked whether Wales can police itself out of the drugs crisis, and how inventive criminal justice practice and progressive harm reduction measures can transform the treatment landscape.

Summary of Speakers:

Cullan Mais

Podcast host of The Central Club: A Voice through Adversity

Cullan shared his life story. A former 10 year Heroin and Crack user who 'lived a life of recklessness'. When he became clean in 2020 with the support of Recovery Cymru and Kaleidoscope, his goal became to eradicate stigma for those who have addictions, and show that no matter how bad your problems there is light at the end of the tunnel.

'Most of the people I met in that life were just the same as everyone else, but had that one little event that brought them into the world of drugs'

Whilst many people he met had experienced trauma, Cullan had not, but now he realises that he had some unaddressed mental health issues. 'The first lesson is don't take drugs to mask problems.'

Cullan and peers were successful people smoking crack and sometimes using Heroin to come down. When money became a problem he avoided the criminal route and begged on the street rather than committing crime. 'I think that this is true for 90% of drug users who have been in prison. They never planned to be robbers or drug dealers, but the addiction forced it'. When addiction led him to crime and prison he was absolutely terrified. 'I never saw myself as a criminal. I felt like that first time I didn't have a fair chance of rehabilitation and saw loads of people in a similar situation.'

His experience was that as soon as you have a criminal record you're done. You can't get a job so there is no other option than more crime. 'There is something else we have to

be able to do to help people in that situation – suspended sentence isn't enough. DRR and community service is not enough.'

Meeting someone from Kaleidoscope who had been through that experience and come out the other side, coupled with Buprenorphine treatment provided the missing link for Cullan.

He concluded by saying 'We can't write people off'

Martin Blakebrough added that treatment providers need to invest more in people who have lived experience. People like Rondine Molinaro, who is a manager of a treatment service in Kaleidoscope and who have that experience are vital. The next two speakers can help us explore the question could there have been another alternative to prison for people like Cullan?

Useful Links:

- The Central Club YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVjOe4UwNRZx89uBXojoPcw/featured>
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVjOe4UwNRZx89uBXojoPcw/about>
- Twitter account:
https://twitter.com/thecentralclub?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/thecentralclubpodcast/>
- Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/thecentralclubpodcast/>

Jason Kew

Former Chief Inspector with Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit as lead for Drugs and Harm Reduction and head of innovative practice at the Centre for Justice Innovation.

Jason explained how his first career in the military taught him how to rigidly apply rules. As a result when he became a police officer in 1996 stationed in Kingston upon Thames (where Kaleidoscope were based) he became 'Robocop'. He became very good at arresting people for drug offences, particularly around the Kaleidoscope project where he became well known.

When Martin 'invited him in for a cup of tea' it took several visits to get over his preconceptions that the place and people using it were somehow dirty and unclean. Eventually a combination of his first-hand experiences working under-cover living on the streets, and establishing a personal connection with a young man from a well off family and seeing his path to addiction and eventual overdose changed Jason's perspective.

He came to see the people beneath that needle and the trauma and began to learn no one ever intended to become addicted to drugs. In fact the vast majority of substance users have a lot of trauma

Jason became the protector of 'the 'Scope' and volunteered to be the police Single Point of Contact for it. This contact helped him realise people from across society used drugs have for 1,000s of years and the penny dropped about addiction, trauma and difficulty. Working alongside Kaleidoscope also showed that when and if people are ready, they can turn around.

'That is the key. I used to nick people and hand them over to the drug service to think I'd fixed the problem. When I got to know the substance using community, and realise how lovely they are, yet saw them overdose or murdered or kidnapped [I] wanted to find another way'.

Jason shared a number of statistics:

- 100,000s are arrested for possession.
- You're 12 x more likely to be convicted for cannabis possession if you are black than if you're white.
- Jason explained that the police have traditionally been driven to make so many arrests and chase convictions because it was seen as a deterrent to drug use.
- 25% of people consume their first ever drug in prison – the very place they are sent to prevent drug use in society.

Arrest and prison don't work.

'The answers start with education, education, education and awareness, awareness, awareness. We need to make the best intervention before dependency starts'. But currently there is almost no education.

- 3.5 million adults used a controlled drug in 2021 (per surveys).
- 1.3 million 16-24 year olds consumed a control drug.
- 10% of them used class A drugs.
- 10% of 11-15 year old users use class A drugs.
- Where is the education?

From a Policing perspective a far better route is Diversion. 'When police find someone in possession would you rather a Drug Service Expert deal with it, or a police officer?' DSEs can deal with that instead of police and several forces are now operating some form of diversion scheme. Diversion means we can have a conversation with person in possession without criminal sanction – an honest 2 way conversation and invite that person to learn more about the drug they've been found with. Some teenagers need education. Some homeless people might need naloxone and referral to a service. 'Does a person found with drugs need a criminal record? No – because the deterrent hasn't worked'

Despite some newspapers like get upset about Diversion, 'but there is nothing 'soft' about preventing death.'

For young people we have seen that 6 weeks of school exclusion doesn't work when caught in possession. Instead the drug service can come in to school, free to the school as there are already statutory provided drug services in England within children's social care budgets.

Jason said this approach is simple to implement and his charity (details below) can help set that up for free.

'We need a similar approach for adults. There is a conversation PCCs have to have alongside public health to fund it.' Some education and awareness package is needed (perhaps online) for those that don't need to go to the drug service. We don't want to overwhelm drug services.

Diversion works alongside Overdose Prevention Centres and Drug Consumption Rooms (DCR).

Jason concluded with an experience from a visit to Denmark where there is the biggest DCR in Europe. A homeless man came in for the first time in his life. His heroin was tested for contaminants. The nurse checked his health and circumstances and within 20 minutes he'd been triaged for dental treatment, screened for Blood Borne Viruses, advised on wound care, given a bed for night, and most of all love and care. He was asked to come back and agreed. That was his first ever experience of having a chance of care, and he immediately went into a recovery pathway, rather than down a criminal route.

Martin Blakebrough added that on the policing front work in Durham has had a big impact on Wales, and Dyfed-Powys police have done a lot of work in this space which Dafydd will speak on.

Useful Links:

- Jason Kew on Twitter: https://twitter.com/jqjasonkew?s=20&t=y_2D1CBPNumvll9bdVn2TQ
- Centre of Justice Innovation website: <https://justiceinnovation.org/>
- Centre of Justice Innovation on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/cjinnovation>

Dafydd Llywelyn

Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys.

Dafydd thanked Cullen for sharing his lived experience, and Peredur for enabling this discussion to take place. 'I like the analogy of being Robocop. I want to ensure we don't have young recruits churned out into being Robocops focussed on bare bones of law and legality.'

Dafydd said the existing framework is outdated and needs a refresh and review. The UK drug strategy is an opportunity to make ground breaking strides but the opportunity is not being taken in Westminster.

The Police accept that from a cultural-perspective things need to change, but legislative change is also key.

Wales has 2 diversion schemes – Dyfed-Powys and North Wales services. Ron Hogg PCC in Durham is an ex-policeman and has been able to bring in Diversion to Durham. Using

Durham's learning and academic rigour it has been possible to sell the idea into other England and Wales police forces.

Welsh Government have been listening to the Policing perspective. Alongside cultural change, key is that the Area Planning Board structures give the 'top cover' in relation to this issue. PCCs are alongside Chief Constables are trying to persuade Welsh Government to be more radical within the APB structure.

There is broad support for Wales to provide a completely different approach, with Diversion at heart of it. 'We need to move away from perverse situation of giving clean needles to substance users but then sending them away to consume the drug' often on the streets. 'The OPC ambulance here today is an example of what can be done.'

'My personal goals are to have all 4 forces working in the same way in Wales, with the aim to deliver change and alignment asap over next months and years. We need greater interventions to reduce numbers going to prison, reduce the criminal cycle, with the ultimate goal of fewer drug related deaths. It should be a stain on our track record as a nation the number of deaths we have each year.'

Useful Links:

- Dafydd Llywelyn on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/DyfedPowys2016?s=20&t=nYXIfbqNmdF3JETbCej8kA>

Summary of Questions, Comments and Suggestions Raised:

Peredur thanked the speakers. 'It is wonderful to see so many people here interested in the subject, and we can think now how we might evolve this group to take a little more time to explore this'

It is clear that Diversion and intervention are key. How do we ensure that magical moment happens so that the user at that moment at that point the support is there? How do we work together to get the structures in place so that when that intervention is needed it can happen?

Cullan was asked 'what came together for you at that moment? Could it be replicated?'

He replied that 'I knew I would die if I didn't make a change, but then Covid presented an opportunity for each service to contact me and engage.' Being offered work and training and hope at that point made the difference.

Dafydd added that the problem is the first arrest gets people on the system, then the second time there are greater sanctions, and things get harder and worse. We need to de-escalate that and give diversionary opportunities over-and-over again to break that escalation. Police do have the chance now with school children to treat them as children first and offenders second particularly for lower-level offending. We should replicate that in the adult sphere, again for lower-level offending. Devolved policing would enable Wales to take that step.

Question from the floor – ‘How much power does Welsh Government have over policing?’

A. No direct power, but there is soft power in terms of partnership with PCCs embedded over last 6-8 years.

Martin Powell from Transform drugs was asked to share the Portuguese experience

Martin started by saying Welsh Government does have money which is key to set up Diversion practices. Although Diversion massively saves money over the longer term there is some set up cost. Because Diversion is an operational matter Police do have an opportunity. Wales has an opportunity to take a lead here. In the language of the UK Government, in England, they have replaced the word Diversion with ‘tough consequences’ which is not helpful. ‘I believe there is real scope for Wales to create it’s own identity for Diversion in Wales and it’s own unique approach’

In terms of the Portuguese model, if you are caught with drugs you are sent to a ‘dissuasion committee’ which includes a social worker and a health care worker. 95% of the time they dismiss the matter, but 5% are sent on to support services (they don’t want to overwhelm support services). That model is a critical enabler that reduces stigma, because it doesn’t criminalise and releases resources.

Martin shared some figures

- In 2001 there were 76 deaths in Portugal. By 2011 it was 10 deaths.
- 38% of UK prisoners are there for drug related crimes.
- In Portugal it was 40%, but by 2019 less than 16%.
- Portugal is well below the EU average.
- Portugal has the lowest figures amongst young people.
- Drug use for 15 to 24 year olds fell for 10 years.
- Needle related infections fell from 1,297 to just 16 between 2007 to 2019
- Hepatitis C fell for 10 years.
- In England and Wales since 1986 we have 3 million criminal records.
- 680,000 years spent in prison.

Martin P. said ‘What a waste of lives. What a waste of money are resources. It costs £48,000 a year on average to put someone in prison.

If you look at the West Midlands PCCs drug recommendations – the Governor of HMP Featherstone contributed and said ‘if you want to end the prison drug problem, stop sending people with drug problems to prison.

Ben Lloyd from G4S noted that they are working with GDAS and Kaleidoscope in Gwent to work on Diversion. In 2019 they developed a new service with workers at Police Custody suites.

Adam Holland highlighted an open letter from 85 organisations and 150 individuals advocating for OPCs and DCRs in 2021. The UK Government said ‘no’, but at the House of Commons yesterday a fresh letter to change misuse of drugs regulations to provide

exemptions was presented, with the aim to allow OPCs as an exemption. Today's participants were invited to sign this new letter.

Martin Blakebrough highlighted that in speaking to the public today by the Overdose Prevention Centre ambulance people of all ages were not against OPCs. Martin suggested a Welsh petition to the Senedd – and to take the petition out on the streets for public engagement.

A member of the audience shared their Portuguese experience. 'I've worked in services for 20 years. When I went to Portugal I thought I'd seen it all. The thing that comes through is that criminality kills people. What we are doing just isn't working. But in Portugal I walked up to people injecting or smoking crack but none of the users were suspicious of me even though I look like a copper. None of them were playing that game you play to get a prescription. The solution isn't big and complicated – it is compassion and love. If you give me that I'll listen to you and engage with you. Give me a criminal sentence and my defences will go up.'

Thomas from the Wallich homeless charity highlighted that a trauma informed framework for public services is currently being consulted on. Getting police, courts and probation involved in that is key. 'Please take a look at that.'

Martin Blakebrough added 'educating people so they can generate a more compassionate view of people who take drugs is key.' Peer speakers are key, but also some users are entitled to live a normal life without needing to speak up – people need to be comfortable just to be themselves and live their own lives.

Question for Jason – In Hampshire there is a self-funded model where those being Diverted would pay a fee to participate. Is that a likely model that might be commissioned more in the future?

Jason responded 'Any criminal justice outcome should be free. Offender pay schemes create social inequality.' He added that Police leadership is a moving feast as ideology changes all the time. It is up to us in charities to keep things going forward. An example of inequality – at the Reading Festival we were asked to fill the space with a very visible police presence. At nearby Royal Ascot – no policing at all...

Question – How much training to Welsh officers get?

Dafydd responded 'I think we could do more – it's being up and running for 3 years. There is a capacity issue in terms of where people get diverted to and it remains a task for us to ensure front line officers know where to divert people to.' That said there is an App now that can be used and means we can avoid any custody, straight into diversion.

Question – how do we influence politicians to be braver when it comes to party politics? I was really disappointed to see Labour bashing the Lib Dems over cannabis policy during the recent local elections.

Answer – Simon Hart Secretary of State for Wales recently asked if we need to worry so much about taking the public with us on this agenda? Maybe politicians need to be braver when it comes to making evidence led changes?

Observation – I've found Welsh PCCs are willing to put their heads above the parapet. I something think politicians aren't brave enough and don't understand the public perspective. Even local Facebook community groups in Newport are saying 'why don't [substance users] have somewhere to go to consume drugs'.

Cullan asked – Diversion seems to be about how you deal with people who are 'found with drugs' in low level crime – is it just that?

Answer – in Dyfyd Powys it is all lower level offending eg a shoplifting offence where someone is found with drugs. Diversion can happen at that point in terms of housing, employment, drugs, alcohol, and avoids that escalation. This is where politicians need to be bold and not ring fence certain policies – allowing decisions to be more fluid and dynamic in relation to the individual concerned. Diversion is a way for police to divert the individual out of criminal justice system to the specialists.

Peredur closed by saying at the next meeting we will try to get Lynne Neagle to come along to give us her perspective on what she is trying to achieve as Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing. 'I would like us to be a critical friend, to listen and understand.'

He concluded by encouraging attendees to find someone they've not talked to before and listen to their perspective.

Martin closed by saying we need more treatment places. Police are having to use money for healthcare when they should be using it for diversion. Welsh Government needs to ensure treatment is there within 24 hours from a health perspective.

Martin concluded by thanking everyone for coming and especially to Peredur for providing this space for the conversation.