

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Alcohol and Drugs held on
Tuesday, 2nd October, 2018, Committee Room 5, Scottish Parliament

1 Welcome

John Finnie MSP opened the meeting

2. Attendance

John Finnie MSP
Stuart McMillan MSP, SNP
Dave Liddell
Kirsten Horsburgh
Austin Smith
Aileen O'Gorman
Mark McCann
Dr David Johnson
Tracey Stewart
Tracey McFall
Carmen McShane
Dr Hannah Carver
Dr Duncan Stewart
Duncan McCormick
Tim Stone
Laura Hoskins
David Williams
Isobel Nesbit
Dr Tony Martin
John Budd
Michael Trail
Carol Chamberlain
Sam MacLeod
Amy Gainford
Dr Carole Hunter
Saket Priyadarshi
Steven Johnson
Harry Mennie
Dr Joseph Tay Wee Teck
Suzanne Smith
Rowan Anderson
Leon Pepper
Joanna Willis
Susan Grant
Laura Mitchell
Peter McDade
Gill Donnan

2. Fatal Drug Overdose deaths in Scotland an update

The meeting heard from 3 speakers concerning the continuing rise of fatal overdose deaths in Scotland

- Dr Tony Martin, Research Associate, NHS GG&C
- Kirsten Horsburgh, Scottish Drugs Forum, Strategy Coordinator,(drug death prevention)
- Steven Johnston, Assistant Chief Constable, Police Scotland

Dr Tony Martin, Research Associate, NHS GG&C

Presentation attached to the minute. Key issues highlighted included the continued rise in deaths among the over 35s. The first 6 months of this year had seen a significant increase over those in 2017. There were also larger percentage increases among women.

- Kirsten Horsburgh, Scottish Drugs Forum, Strategy Coordinator,(drug death prevention)

SDF had produced a toolkit for ADPs – ‘Staying alive in Scotland’. SDF have been supportive of Drug Consumption Rooms but there are things we can do now. In particular the need to improve service quality and treatment options (including prescribing). Including swifter (eg same day) access to Opioid Replacement Therapy. We need to get better at retaining people in treatment. People are not ‘hard to reach’ but services can be hard to engage with. There needs to be a great focus on outreach

- Steven Johnston, Assistant Chief Constable, Police Scotland

Working on developing a drug strategy for the Police. He stressed Article 2 of the Human Rights Act – the right to life. The impression is that 2018 will see 1100 deaths through fatal overdose. Seeing the problem as a public health issue is a major step forward. There was a dangerous narrative that this was a ‘lifestyle choice’ and ‘people have it coming to them’.

3 New Drug and alcohol Strategy consultation

A wide ranging discussion took place on the new drug and alcohol strategy. A following is summary.

1. Strategy is virtually silent on fatal drug overdose deaths

There was a consensus that this needed to be rectified and as a result the strategy as drafted lacked credibility and clear leadership.

2. Title of Strategy

The title had to convey a sense of urgency as to what we were trying to achieve. The concern is that without a clear message the strategy won't have the desired impact.

3. The Quality of the Draft

The remarks around the quality of the report, even as a draft, were not complimentary.

4. Combining Drugs and Alcohol

There were comments that Government should think again regarding combining these two areas as at present it did not read as a coherent narrative.

5. Lack of Context

The report as drafted had a lack of context for recommendations and points that were made.

6. Evidence Base

The strategy should articulate the body of evidence in relation to addiction treatment. This should in particular highlight the protective benefits of treatment with regard to drug related deaths.

7. Wider Issues

Important wider issues are omitted from the draft including, for example, the impact of welfare reform and sanctions. There is also little mention of BBV and Sexual Health and no mention of the Glasgow HIV outbreak.

John Finnie agreed to liaise with Monica Lennon's office to send a letter along these lines to the Public Health Minister.

Future topics for discussion

The next meeting would focus on stigma and alcohol

Dates for future meetings

Next meeting: 04 December 2018

This meeting will be held at 6pm in the David Livingston Room (CR6). This meeting will include the AGM.

26 February 2019 at 6pm in the James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

28 May 2019 at 6pm in the James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)