

WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE: INQUIRY INTO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health and Social Services urgently commission a piece of work (in partnership with counterparts in the UK, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments if helpful) to establish the best method for measuring NPS use among the population on a regular basis so that its prevalence is better understood and services can be planned accordingly. This work should complement similar activity recommended by the Home Office’s Expert Panel on NPS (recommendation 3.2) and should be completed by the end of the Fourth Assembly.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has recently commissioned Public Health Wales to undertake a prevalence estimate of problematic drug use, including NPS stimulants, for the ten year period 2011-12 to 2020-21. This work will commence shortly and the first estimate is expected in October 2015. Discussions are also ongoing with UK Focal Point about commissioning a UK wide drug prevalence estimate and the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales are advocating strongly for the inclusion of synthetic cannabinoids in this work.

Recommendation 2

That the Minister for Health and Social Services ensure that the 2015 public awareness campaign:

- **includes targeted information for young people;**
- **has a strong media and social media focus; and**
- **emphasises the message that “legal does not mean safe”.**

The public awareness campaign should refrain from using the term “legal highs” to describe NPS as its use gives the false impression that these substances are safe to use. Guidance to this effect should be shared with all partners working on the campaign, including the media.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government does not use the term legal highs and has not done so for a number of years. This recommendation will be addressed as part of the ongoing work undertaken with the national drug and alcohol helpline, DAN 24/7. This work involves social media and will focus on the risks of the use of NPS, together with information surrounding terminology to reinforce the message that

legal does not mean safe.

Recommendation 3

That the Minister for Health and Social Services commission research to evaluate the impact of the 2015 public awareness campaign on the level of public awareness of NPS and their harms. The purpose of this research should be to assess the campaign's effectiveness and to identify where further work is required to raise awareness of NPS.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government officials will work closely with DAN 24/7 to evaluate the impact of the campaign and commission further areas of work to raise awareness of NPS based upon the findings.

Recommendation 4

That the Welsh Ministers evaluate the implementation of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme as a matter of urgency, and determine whether it is delivering value for money on the investment made and educating pupils about the harms of NPS. The conclusions of this evaluation should inform the implementation of Professor Gordon Donaldson's recommendations on the review of the curriculum for Wales.

Response: Accept

The All Wales Schools Liaison Core Programme has been evaluated positively on a number of occasions; the most recent evaluation was published in 2011. As joint funders of the programme, a further review of the programme by the four Welsh police forces and Welsh Government is about to commence and we will ensure that the review includes an assessment of the investment made to educate pupils about the harms of NPS. The findings of the review will be fed into the implementation of Professor Donaldson's review of the curriculum in Wales.

Recommendation 5

That the Welsh Ministers work with key stakeholders to identify further methods to improve drug education, particularly in relation to NPS, in schools, and to achieve a greater consistency in approach across Wales. The Welsh Ministers should provide guidance to ensure that all those providing drug education in schools are suitably trained and qualified to deliver it.

Response: Accept

School community police officers deliver the All Wales Schools Liaison Core Programme. Each officer has two lessons observed per academic year by the regional co-ordinators (who are qualified teachers with at least seven years teaching experience) and the national co-ordinator also observes at least three officers in each force per year. This ensures that standards are maintained and consistent messages to children and young people are conveyed. A working group consisting of Welsh Government, teachers, substance misuse and Public Health Wales will be established to review the existing lesson content in relation to NPS.

We will also consider what further work needs to be undertaken with further and higher educational establishments to provide information surrounding the risks and harms associated with NPS as part of the new three-year substance misuse delivery plan currently in development.

Guidance for Substance Misuse Education (SME) was published in July 2013. The guidance is for all organisations in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors that offer educational opportunities to children and young people under the age of 19. It replaced *Substance Misuse: Children and Young People* National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 17/02 and provides detailed information relating to the delivery of appropriate SME according to curriculum requirements and specific need, and substance misuse incident management including support, legislation and good practice.

Recommendation 6

That the Welsh Ministers consider undertaking an awareness-raising campaign about NPS and their harms that is targeted specifically at parents. This campaign should focus on enabling parents to have open conversations about the risks associated with NPS use and to provide accurate information to their children to enable them to make informed choices.

Recommendation 7

That the Welsh Ministers work with specialists in the substance misuse field to develop relevant and appropriate literature about NPS for parents, and encourage all schools in Wales to provide this information to their pupils' parents

Response: Accept Recommendation 6 and 7.

In 2014 the Welsh Government published a substance misuse handbook for parents and carers about addressing substance misuse (including NPS) issues. We will work with DAN 24/7 to widen the ongoing substance misuse awareness raising campaigns to target parents and to encourage them to talk to their children about NPS.

Substance misuse literature for parents has recently been developed and disseminated widely to a range of providers throughout Wales. This work was carried out in collaboration with provider agencies, carers and service users and includes appropriate NPS information. We will redistribute the literature to schools and substance misuse providers to maximise coverage.

We will also consider what further support can be provided to educate parents of substance misusers as part of the development of the new Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18.

Recommendation 8

That the Welsh Ministers trial training opportunities for parents, such as Care for the Family’s “How to drug proof your kids” programme. The trials should be evaluated before a more comprehensive programme of training for parents is rolled-out.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government officials will work closely with relevant stakeholders to evaluate this and similar programmes for parents to establish best practice in this area, before considering what further training is required.

Recommendation 9

That the Welsh Ministers roll out a national training programme on NPS for public-facing staff. This should be trialled in the first instance within NHS Wales.

Response: Accept

A national training programme on NPS commenced in 2013 and initially focused on mephedrone. To date 33 mephedrone information sessions have been delivered to 810 professionals throughout Wales. A harm reduction training manual has also been produced to support substance misuse professionals to respond to the rise in NPS stimulants within both NHS and third sector organisations, including those agencies who work on the periphery of substance misuse.

The training programme is ongoing and we will work with Public Health Wales to consider what further support is required for public facing staff on NPS, including specific training on synthetic cannabinoids. We will also consider the development of e-learning modules on NPS and other drugs so the prevention and response to substance misuse can be more integrated into mainstream health service delivery.

Recommendation 10

That the Welsh Ministers work with health boards and other relevant public services to identify the steps that need to be taken to adapt substance misuse support services to meet the needs to NPS users and support early intervention. This work should include:

- considering a revision to the commissioning and performance management framework for support services; and**
- increasing the provision of drop in services and co-location with other services.**

Response: Accept

The issue of NPS is discussed at regional meetings and local commissioning strategies have begun to adapt to the growing need within this area. The Welsh Government has provided training, invested in the WEDINOS programme and produced harm reduction booklets to support services to change their working practice and focus on a wide range of substances rather than just Class A drugs.

We are currently consulting on revised commissioning guidance for substance misuse commissioners and will ensure that the final published version includes advice on commissioning NPS services.

The actions needed to adapt substance misuse services to support the needs of NPS users are being considered as part of the development of the new substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18.

Recommendation 11

That the Welsh Ministers work with the Home Office to develop a strategy that enables Welsh prisons to deal effectively with the anticipated increase in NPS use among prisoners within the Welsh prison estate. This strategy should include:

- an analysis of lessons learnt from experiences in English prisons; and**
- details of the steps that will be taken to provide targeted information and training for prisoners and prison staff respectively.**

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government accepts the need for parity across all treatment sectors in Wales and works closely with Welsh prisons regarding a range of issues surrounding substance misuse including NPS. Public Health Wales (via the

WEDINOS programme) is fully engaged with all the prisons in Wales delivering training and providing advice and information relating to the use of NPS – this work will continue along with wider engagement across the UK.

We will review information from a pilot in 10 prisons in the northwest of England to establish a better understanding of the scale of the use of NPS, illicit drugs and prescription medicines in custody. We will work with the Welsh prison estate to implement the lessons learned from this pilot.

Recommendation 12

That the Welsh Ministers set out their expectations for coordination between sectors, including health, social care, and local authorities, to tackle NPS use and its harms. This statement of expectation should be accompanied by a timetable for reviewing progress and performance. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Ministers work in partnership with UK Ministers to ensure that this coordinated approach includes the criminal justice sector.

Response: Accept

We have strengthened our governance arrangements through the establishment of the Substance Misuse National Partnership Board, which oversees the delivery of the 'Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008-2018 - Working Together to Reduce Harm' and the associated delivery plan. Membership of the board comprises of Welsh Government, statutory agencies, criminal justice agencies, the third sector and service user representatives. Its role is to advise the Ministers, via Welsh Government officials, about progress relating to any related work streams, emerging issues and any risks to the delivery of the substance misuse strategy and its associated delivery plan. This board meets three times a year.

The National Core Standards for Substance Misuse are in place to support partners in delivering the commitment in the strategy to improving the quality and consistency of substance misuse services in Wales. There are 25 core standards which aim to strengthen the governance and accountability of substance misuse service planning and delivery; ensure that a citizen-focused approach is integrated into all key activities related to service planning, review and delivery; and ultimately ensure that the full range of services is delivered effectively, safely and consistently across Wales.

We have also established an Area Planning Boards' Chairs group where progress against the current delivery plan and the substance misuse core standards are monitored and where appropriate, challenged. This is in addition to the annual monitoring visits undertaken between Welsh Government officials and Area Planning Board colleagues.

The Welsh Government is currently consulting with a wide range of partners on the development of the next substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18. The actions needed to address NPS across all sectors will be set out in this plan and regularly reviewed as part of the aforementioned governance arrangements in place to monitor the Welsh substance misuse strategy.

Recommendation 13

The Committee welcomes the Home Office's expert panel's recommendation of a ban on the supply of NPS in the UK, similar to the approach introduced in Ireland. The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health and Social Services work closely with the UK Government elected after the next general election to ensure early action is taken to progress the expert panel's recommendation. In doing so, the Minister should be mindful of – and emphasise – the evidence submitted to this inquiry which suggests that:

- legislation alone will not solve the problems caused by NPS use in Wales; and**
- awareness raising and education would have the greatest impact on reducing the use and associated harms of NPS.**

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of both legislation and education in tackling NPS and has written to the chair of the UK Government expert panel supporting the review recommendations. Welsh Government substance misuse officials are in regular contact with their Home Office counterparts and will work with them to ensure that any legislation to tackle NPS reflects the Welsh Government's policy position and delivery environment in Wales.

Recommendation 14

That the Minister for Health and Social Services work in partnership with the UK Government, and other devolved administrations, to ensure that Welsh interests are reflected in all future negotiations on the European Commission's proposals relating to NPS.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will continue to work in partnership with the UK Government to ensure that Welsh interests are taken into account at the UK and European level. For example, the Welsh Government is regularly invited to

submit views on both UK legislation and European Commission proposals relating to substance misuse, including NPS.

Wales has formed links with and submits reports to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug addiction (EMCDDA). The EMCDDA strives to be the "reference point" on drug usage for the European Union's member states, and to deliver "factual, objective, reliable and comparable information" about drug usage, drug addiction and related health complications, including [hepatitis](#), [HIV/AIDS](#) and [tuberculosis](#).

The British Irish Council has a specific work stream focussed on substance misuse which provides an additional and useful forum for all UK administrations to consider joint approaches to NPS. This joint approach allows us to evaluate current research and practice to inform future commissioning decisions and outcomes.