

Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery

National Oversight Committee

Friday 3rd December 2021 at 10am via Microsoft Teams

1 Introduction

Minister Feighan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and in particular, new members, Ministerial nominees and Chairs of the Strategic Implementation Groups (SIGs). He also welcomed returning members.

2 Minutes and matters arising

There was a correction from AGS which was contained in Seamus Boland's presentation and this will be amended accordingly.

Anna Quigley referred to Citywide amendment to include in text and said she would forward the amendment again.

Anna said there was confusion about their status in relation to the committee. An email from Dept. of Health was received to nominate one person to the committee pending changes in membership. They always had two members on the committee and there was no reference to the amendment of the membership in the last minutes. Anna disagreed with the approach taken by the Dept. of Health. It was agreed they would meet with the Department to discuss it.

The Minister said he is aware there is confusion. Jim Walsh suggested the matter be discussed under Item 4 on the agenda and Anna agreed to this.

Asst. Commissioner John O'Driscoll submitted his corrections to the minutes earlier and these will be made.

John Bennett followed up with Ben Ryan. Ben agreed to provide an update on the status of work on community partnerships as requested.

The draft minutes were agreed subject to matters being amended.

3 Presentation on “Informing and Supporting Change: Drug and Alcohol Misuse among people on probation supervision in Ireland”– David Kenny, The Probation Service

David Kenny, Regional Manager, The Probation Service thanked Minister Feighan and Jim Walsh for the opportunity to present on this report and said that the study was carried out by Dr. Louise Rooney, UCD, in 2019. An overview of the Probation Services showed there were 400 staff in 35 offices nationwide with 16,607 people supervised in the community.

A survey was developed and conducted in partnership with the CSO. The research sample consisted of 3,096 service clients which consisted of adults and young persons subject to probation supervision. The areas addressed in the study included background details/demographics, level and type of both alcohol and drug misuse as well as the Probation Service’s response to substance misuse. The main findings of the study were that 81% of clients reported misusing drugs and/or alcohol.

Among other findings, it was found that cannabis, benzos, cocaine and heroin had the highest level of misuse. Males were more likely to misuse cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis while females were more likely to misuse heroin.

Among the key recommendations and next steps were policy development and research and training opportunities. It was also recommended that there be alignment with the National Drugs Strategy in areas of diversion, addressing treatment needs, etc.

4. Implementation of strategic priorities and new structures

Minister Feighan said he was aware that there are concerns regarding the new structures but he understood from the last meeting that there was a broad welcome to establish a Civil Society.

Anna Quigley said that at the last meeting, the proposal for a Civil Society grouping was raised. It was agreed that a meeting would take place with Department officials after that meeting. The proposal for a Civil Society was that they would assign members to this committee. This was written into the Strategy in 2017 – core networks who are members. Anna said they accept the fact that the Minister can change the membership but there should be some rationale for changes. There has been no process whatsoever and the decision has been made. In addition, Citywide participated fully in the Mid-Term Review by sending in a submission initially followed by

further obs afterwards. They were surprised to see that their views weren't taken on board and that nothing had been changed in the draft report. Anna said she felt very passionate after 25 years experience and in particular, the fact that people who take the lead in their community see the results and issues from Day 1. She stated that she received very little detail on the Civil Society Group.

Minister Feighan said he valued her views and experience and there needs to be a greater focus on communications. DPSIU said there was no proposal to remove the Community and Voluntary sectors/networks from NOC (including Citywide). Nothing other than this has ever been proposed. Anna said her understanding was that the Civil Society grouping will choose four members. DPSIU reiterated that there is no proposal to remove any of the national networks from NOC but just to have four members to streamline the NOC. Minister Feighan said he would sort out any difficulties in the coming weeks and DPSIU agreed to this.

Andy O'Hara said that UISCE are supportive of the concerns raised by Citywide. The CSG in theory may have some benefits; however, the current proposed structures may leave the named community partners with less access and less of a voice.

A Civil Society Grouping may offer up an opportunity to increase participation and access for marginalised groups (which we would always encourage and support) but some of the unintended consequences may be the groups who are named and represent those most affected who support a health led approach may end up marginalised in the process - as the process is unclear.

We have come a long way in recognising the need for a health led approach and the need to prioritise the participation of PWUD's and marginalised groups and communities. The Civil Society Grouping could be colonised by groups not aligned with a health lead approach and who may have the power to vote people onto the NOC and SIG's and undermine the overall goals, aims and spirit of the National Drug Strategy.

Tony Duffin concurred with Andy O'Hara, saying that the NVDAS are also supportive of the concerns raised by Citywide; and he acknowledged the commitment of all NOC members

working through these issues. He agreed that there needs to be a greater focus on communications - as stated by Minister Feighan at the meeting. He thanked DPSIU for clarifying that there is no proposal to remove any of the national networks; and thereby confirming that NVDAS, UISCE, Citywide and Family Support will continue to act as the civil society representative organisations on the NOC.

DPSIU then gave an update on the Strategic Implementation Groups (SIGs). The chairs of the 6 SIGs have been appointed and they are as follows:

Dr. Gerry McCarney, Pat Bennett, Dr. Fiona Fenton, Ciarán Reid, Judge Ann Ryan and Dr. Sarah Morton.

DPSIU gave a brief outline of the purpose of each group. The next steps will be to establish these groups – which will be proceeding shortly. There is still time to send in nominations for the groups.

Ciarán Reid thanked the Minister for appointing him and welcomed the opportunity to chair one of the SIGs. He has expertise in tackling areas of disadvantage in both Ballyfermot and Drogheda. Minister Feighan thanked all the Chairs and wished them well.

5. Drug Related Intimidation and Violence Engagement (DRIVE Project) – Bríd Walsh

Bríd Walsh, Chair of the DRIVE Oversight Committee introduced the above report and said Eamonn Seydak, Consultant on the report would look at the key aspects. Eamonn explained that they are at Phase 1 of this project now and that it manifests itself in different ways in disadvantaged communities. Research has been carried out to develop a practical implementation model. The second phase is to recruit a Programme Manager.

Eamonn said as many stakeholders as possible had an opportunity to comment with thirty six interviews being conducted. The report sets out all the findings from the consultation process and drew on the 2017 HRB Report.

The DRIVE model comprises six key pillars and the model is supported by a series of eighteen actions. The role of the DATF is very important in this.

- Pillar 1 – co-design and development of a new reinvigorated DRIVE training programme,
- Pillar 2 – data collection and analysis,
- Pillar 3 – information sharing,
- Pillar 4 – community level supports,
- Pillar 5 – law enforcement and
- Pillar 6 – legislation and systemic change.

Recruitment of a National DRIVE Coordinator will be carried out shortly and there will be continued engagement with the HRB re data collection processes. The development of training and a Train the Trainer programme will also be carried out.

Joe O'Neill said in terms of engaging with the DRIVE project, the role of family support services will be critical in supporting this.

6. Updates

6a. The National Drugs Forum and recent research paper published by the HRB

Brian Galvin, HRB, spoke about the National Drugs Forum which was held on the 23rd November 2021 and said that one hundred and sixty people had registered for this Forum. Following the Minister's address, there were two keynote speakers. One spoke on the HRB Evidence Review: Service User Involvement in Services while the other spoke on the European Web Survey on Drugs (2021): Preliminary Findings.

Regarding research in 2022, the HRB awarded two projects with a Health Inclusion Focus – one of these is to be funded by the RCSI and the other one is to be funded by TCD. The HRB is planning to publish a number of new reports in 2022. It has just commissioned TCD to work with them on secondary data analysis to be published in the first half of 2022 – “Secondary data analysis of GUI national longitudinal study of children and young people in Ireland”. Other reports to be published later in 2022 include the “Results of European Web Survey on Drugs”.

6b. Update on the new Dept. of Health funding programme

Jim Walsh said that a fact sheet had been previously circulated on the €6m for Budget 2022 – there was a very focused approach to secure this funding. All this funding is for frontline services, for example the recruitment of healthcare professionals and also to support the work of DATFs. There are two streams DOH would like to follow up. Firstly, the funding of €1.5m to enhance Drug and Alcohol community services, specifically for women, ethnic minorities and LGBTI+ groups. A set amount of funding will be allocated across the 9 CHOs based on a population needs assessment in their areas. Secondly, funding of €0.5m for crack cocaine – this will include community components as well.

Dr. Eamon Keenan said that Jim was referring to crack cocaine and there has been a lot of emphasis on this lately. A HRB survey was carried out in July 2021 on cocaine use and this showed that drug-related deaths are increasing. Cocaine is the secondly most seized drug overall. In relation to the issue of crack cocaine, while it has been increasing, the negative health consequences are exacerbating, e.g. mental illness, paranoia, etc. In Ireland, there was a significant increase in 2020 in females presenting with cocaine use. There is no medication for cocaine unlike in the heroin crisis. Training is required to support and train others in how to deal with cocaine use. Eamon said a call will be put out to the CHO areas to take account of the identified need in these areas and perhaps, some funding can be used to look at the night time economy, festivals, etc.

Jim said he will be engaging with Task Forces and other parties in delivering this funding.

6c. Early Warning Emerging Trends Sub-Committee

Conor Brennan, Medicines, Controlled Drugs & Pharmacy Regulation, followed with a presentation on EWET. They held a Sub-Committee meeting the previous week (26th November). At this meeting, the FSI provided information on cannabinoids and the AGS gave an update on seizures, e.g. crack cocaine seizures. He said HSE Addictions Services have launched a night time campaign looking at nightclubs, etc. The HRB indicated that cannabis is the most commonly used drug and cocaine is the second. There was a discussion on nitrous oxide and the Home Office is going to be contacted about this. In relation to pregabalin, the committee is

looking to set up a sub-group to examine the over-prescribing of this and will need to contact the IMC in this regard.

Dairearca NíNéill said the EWET minutes would be circulated after the meeting.

7. Dates of next meetings

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 3rd March 2022 at 2.30pm. The following meetings will be held on the first Thursdays in June, September and December.

Aisling Sheehan referred to the Sale of Alcohol Bill (Dept. of Justice). The HSE is developing a position paper and response to the Bill. They will be proposing something to minimise the harm alcohol issues can cause.

The list of attendees is at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Attendance

Minister Frank Feighan	Chair, Dept of Health
Conaire Fitzpatrick	Dept of Health
Jim Walsh	Dept of Health
Tadhg Fallon	Dept of Health
Brian Dowling	Dept of Health
Susan McBride	Dept of Health
David Kenny	Irish Probation Service
Brian Galvin	HRB
Ciaran Reid	Chair, SIG
Andy O'Hara	UISCE
Nick Callan, Dept of An Taoiseach replacing Martina O'Shaughnessy	
Dalton Tatton	Dept of Education and Skills
Dr. Gerry McCarney	Chair, SIG
Aisling Sheehan	HSE
Anna Quigley	Citywide
Prof. Catherine Comiskey	Ministerial Nominee
Eamonn Waters	Dept of Housing
Joseph O'Neill, St Ann's Galway, replacing Mick Lacey	
Dr. Hamish Sinclair	HRB
Ciara Pidgeon	DCEDIY

Asst. Commissioner John O'Driscoll	AGS
Ben Ryan	Dept of Justice
Dr. Eamon Keenan	HSE
Brid Walsh	Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators
Tony Duffin	Ana Liffey Drug Project
Dr. Bobby Smyth	Ministerial Nominee
Dr. Sarah Morton	Chair, SIG
John Bennett	Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators Network
Conor Brennan	Dept of Health
Eamonn Seydak,	S3 Solutions – presenter
DOH Secretariat	
Dairearca NíNéill	Dept of Health
Fiona Conroy	Dept of Health
Gillian Treacy	Dept of Health
Sinead Carson	Dept of Health
Apologies	
Pat Bennett	Chair, SIG
Judge Ann Ryan	Chair, SIG
Dr. Sarah Morton has prior commitments and can attend 10-10.50 only	
Dr. Bobby Smyth has prior commitments and can attend 10-10.30 only	
Lisa Robson – Brid Walsh will attend on her behalf	

Anne Marie Seymour – Conor Brennan will attend on her behalf

Martina Shaughnessy - Nick Callan will attend on her behalf