

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery
National Oversight Committee (NOC)
Draft Minutes of the meeting of the 20th September 2019

Attendance:

Minister Catherine Byrne	Department of Health
Angela Willis	An Garda Síochána
Anna Quigley	Community Sector
Anne Corr	Department of Health Secretariat
Aoife Frances	National Family Support Network
Ben Ryan	Department of Justice and Equality
Brian Dowling	Department of Health Secretariat
Bríd Walsh	Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators Network
Caroline Jordan	TUSLA
Catherine Comiskey	Academic Expert
Colm Desmond	Department of Health
Devesh Singh	Department of Employment and Social Protection
David Kenny	The Probation Service
Eamon Keenan	HSE
Enda Kelly	Irish Prison Service
Eva Devaney	Voluntary Drug & Alcohol Treatment Sector
Hamish Sinclair	Health Research Board
Hugh Greaves	Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators Network
Ian Smith	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
Jim Walsh	Department of Health
John O'Driscoll	An Garda Síochána
Karen O'Connor	Department of Health Secretariat
Mark Costello	UISCE
Michael Lacey	Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force Chairs Network
Nicola Clavin	Department of Health
Patrick Benson	Community Sector
Marie-Clare Maney	Revenue Commissioners
Randall Plunkett	Department of Health
Sarah Waters	Department of Health Secretariat
Tony Duffin	National Voluntary Drug & Alcohol Treatment Sector
Paul Wynne	Revenue Commissioners – Presenter
Hilda McDermott	Courts Service – Drug Treatment Court – Presenter
Brendan Sheehy	Department of Justice and Equality - Presenter

Apologies:

Aine Hall	International Nurses Society on Addiction
Margaret Nash	National Voluntary Drug & Alcohol Sector, represented by Eva Devaney
Ken Spratt	Dept of Transport, Tourism and Sport, represented by Ian Smith
Fergus McCabe	Voluntary Sector, represented by Anna Quigley
Bairbre Nic Aongusa	Dept of Rural & Community Development
William Flannery	Irish College of Psychiatrists
Alan Wall	Dept of Education and Skills
Pat Carey	Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force Chairs Network
Clare McNamara	Dept of Children & Youth Affairs – left DCYA ? Replacement
David Kelly	Dept of Housing, Planning & Local Government

1. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from 07 June 2019 were agreed with minor amendments ;

- Under item 3, the Community Sector (CS) requested a written update on the reviews of Task Forces being carried out by the HSE. The CS said they were not clear where they fit in with the HSE evaluations and requested a copy of the Terms of Reference. Also requested was an update on the implementation of the HSE Opioid Substitution Treatment National Clinical Guidelines.
- Under item 5, the CS suggested that a report by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 'Cocaine Use In Ireland' contains a lot of the actions that are still relevant.

DOH provided updates on matters arising from June meeting.

Nurse Prescribing of Opioid Substitution Treatment. The Deputy Chief Nursing Officer is in the process of arranging a meeting for early October with some of the key stakeholders including Aine Hall.

Dual Diagnosis and a Model of Care: In the absence of National Clinical Lead on Dual Diagnosis, the Mental Health Clinical Lead (MHCL) is setting up a new group to look at the model of care. The MHCL and Clinical Lead for Addiction are engaging with key stakeholders and family members who have lost loved ones. The LDATF Co-ordinator's representative voiced concern that there is nobody from community drug treatment agencies or NVDATS or involved in these stakeholder engagements. The HSE representative will feed this back to the MHCL.

Pay restoration: Two Task Force reviews by the HSE took place and Section 39 Task Force reviews are ongoing. HR in the DOH has advised that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) between the Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies in 50 pilot organisations. Discussions have commenced in relation to pay restoration for those bodies outside the pilot organisations.

CS and LDATF Co-ordinator's representative raised issues regarding reviews being carried out only by the HSE. DOH will follow up on this.

CS informed the Group that they were disappointed with the lack of response from DES on the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) as the psychologists were supposed to be in place in 2018 and this should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Minister Byrne will follow up on this.

2. Updates

Early Warning Emerging Trends (EWET) Sub-Committee

The second meeting of the Sub-Committee took place on 16th September. The Terms of Reference had been circulated but no feedback received. A review of the TOR may be looked at within the mid-term evaluation of Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery. A discussion took place relating to recent fatal drug overdose cases and how this information could be circulated and processed confidentially. There are gaps in communicating this information as the committee meets four times a year. It is necessary to ensure that an alert system is in place. In order to progress this, the committee members have been asked to develop a mapping process for sharing, of who they communicate with and how. DOH currently carrying out an exercise to introduce a limit of 0.3 THC for CBD production in Ireland.

DOH apologised to the LDATF Co-ordinator's representative regarding the invitation to join the EWET Sub-Committee and will be in contact with an invitation.

A request was made for the minutes of the EWET Sub-Committee meetings to be circulated to the NOC. DOH will circulate the minutes.

Standing Sub-Committee

DOH advised the themes explored in the July SSC were;

- Minimise the harms caused by the use and misuse of substances
- Address the harms of drug markets and reduce access to drugs for harmful use

- Develop sound and comprehensive evidence-informed policies and actions
- Strengthening the performance of the strategy - Develop an implementation plan to operationalise a Performance Measurement System by 2020

The CS stated that they do not agree with the PMS Group being a technical group and believe membership of the group should be opened up.

Extra funding of €1 million has been provided in three strands;

- Strand 1 - €10,000 to each Task Force
- Strand 2 - provides for 12 Strategic Initiatives to address priorities set out in RHSR
- Strand 3 - provides for a national awareness campaign on the drug-related violence and intimidation reporting programme.

The HSE informed the group that they held an event to mark International Overdose Awareness Day in August.

The Chair opened the IOAD event and highlighted the Supervised Injecting Facility's role in preventing opioid overdose. The Chair advised that following on from the refusal of planning permission for the SIF, she had submitted observations on behalf of the Department of Health in support of Merchant's Quay Ireland's appeal of the planning decision. Minister Byrne stated that clear thinking was needed as these facilities save people's lives and she is hoping the Planning Board will overturn the planning refusal. The HSE has also lodged a submission in support of MQI's appeal.

DOH said that MQI are launching a social media campaign about the situation and asks that people on the Committee support this campaign.

3. Update on the Health Diversion Programme for possession of drugs for personal use

DOH updated the Committee on the recent Government decision to implement a Health Diversion Approach, where the first time a person is identified as being in possession of drugs for personal use they would engage with the Health Service Executive to attend health screening and brief intervention (known as SAOR - Support, Ask and assess, Offer assistance and Refer) with a trained healthcare professional. In the second instance An Garda Síochána (AGS) have discretion to issue an Adult Caution.

The next step is for a small implementation, monitoring and evaluation group to be set up later this month to progress this approach. The group will be chaired by the DOH and membership will include the DOJE, AGS and the HSE. The group will engage with agencies directly regarding operations, legislative changes and costing implications.

The CS and NVDATS requested it be recorded that in their opinion, this approach is a missed opportunity and offers nothing to those people with the most serious problems.

The Chair said this is a step in the right direction and an opportunity for the first time in this country to help young people. She understands some people's frustrations.

DOH noted that if no criminal sanctions were included in this approach, we would be effectively legalising use of drugs and the Working Group were not in favour of legalisation. This approach is a clear statement of a health-led approach. There are still a lot of issues to be worked out and it will be very challenging. This is our opportunity to make a difference. It is very important that all steps are within the legal framework. DOH will update the Committee on the progress of the HDP Implementation Working Group.

4. Drug-Related Public Expenditure (DRPE) – analysis by the combined Justice sector

Presentations were delivered to the Committee by the Department of Justice & Equality, An Garda Síochána, Probation Service, Prison Service and the Revenue Commissioners on drug-related public expenditure.

The DJE summed up the comprehensive and detailed presentations and informed the Group the common thread through the analysis is that it is difficult to extract and quantify expenditure and this is a challenge we need to focus on.

Various points and issues were raised in the ensuing discussion:

- interagency strategies and how the NOC can support the development of good data reporting systems to feed into performance measurement
- a lot of community policing time is concerned with drug use and its impact on the community and it is important that it is resourced
- that data is a starting point and we have to ask what we want this data for and what we are doing with all this information
- the increase of 25% women in prison who have specific needs
- The Probation Service is working on a survey of Substance Use on Probation being released toward end 2019. The RDATAF Coordinators representative requested a breakdown of data by Task Force if possible
- the availability and accessibility of various programmes by people outside Dublin
- the access to the Drug Treatment Court outside Dublin
- the change in the nature of how drugs are being used and sold. The Committee was informed that young children are being groomed for the drugs trade
- DJE informed the Committee that a Private Members Bill on grooming is going through the Houses
- local profiling of people who are living beyond their means

The Irish Prisons Service advised there are 900 – 1000 people a day on methadone in prisons across the country. He advised that there is no release unless a community Opioid Substitution Treatment link is in place. A lot of people relapse after release. Some people have to travel for treatment e.g. in the North West or Kerry.

The HSE stated that there are a number of General Practitioners trained in methadone prescribing. The Medical Council published a statement on the issues GP's are encountering around drugs such as benzodiazepines. The HSE are trying to support GPs with these issues.

The Committee was informed that the Drug Treatment Court is accessible only for people in Dublin. This is due to a resource issue.

The Youth Diversion Programme is available outside Dublin but not everywhere. They are located in areas of highest needs in terms of youth crime.

The Chair has spoken to Minister Stanton regarding the Private Members Bill on Grooming legislation and is waiting for his response. DOJE stated there are a number of issues with the Bill in its current format and they are looking at this at the moment. A criminal justice strategy will be developed starting at the end of 2019 / early 2020. Community policing is a central element of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. A Community Safety Policy is being developed as a priority.

An Garda Síochána advised there is an asset profiler in every Division now. The link with community is very important and there are concerns about children of a young age being groomed for the drugs trade.

DOH commended the Justice family in their work and noted;

- the need to analyse Government expenditure on drugs
- the need to develop guidelines around reporting expenditure and perhaps we could work with the Health Research Board on this
- a missing piece seems to be 'consequences of drugs' as in the hidden cost to society not captured
- there is a need to quantify garda time and extract transactional costs in the areas of arrest, court proceedings, prison escorts

5. Estimates 2020

DOH advised they are currently in discussions with the HSE and that it has been a very challenging year with very limited scope across all Departments. DOH is aware of the priorities in this sector and is trying to keep these priorities of drugs and addiction, homelessness and the health diversion programme, at the top of the agenda

6. AOB

The RDATA Chairs Representative voiced concern regarding anecdotal evidence of the increase level of suicide in the last week in the mid-west Limerick area and asked if members are experiencing this in other area. They have linked in with the local suicide resource officer but they are primarily drug related. The HSE advised ensuring that all those working within area has STORM training (Skills Training on Risk Management).

The NVDATS representative queried whether the Resource Allocation Model for Task Force funding would be phased in this year. DPU clarified it would not.

The CS advised that the community development strategy ‘Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland’ was launched on 28th August 2019.

Up-coming Events

National Drug Forum 2019 - 05th of November in Croke Park.

Launch of the Health Research Board’s evidence review of dual diagnosis treatment services - 25th September in Miesian Plaza

Dates for 2020 NOC meetings will be clarified at the December 06 meeting.

Date of next meeting 6th December 2019 10.00 to 12.30 - Miesian Plaza