

Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery

National Oversight Committee

Friday 24th September 2021 at 10am via Microsoft Teams

Minister Feighan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and in particular, Andy O'Hara, the new UISCE Coordinator, who was attending his first meeting of the NOC.

1 Minutes and matters arising

The Minister advised that there were some proposed amendments from Anna Quigley (reflected in agreed minutes of 18th June 2021) and asked if there were any further proposed amendments.

Anna Quigley thanked everyone involved in the mid-term review and acknowledged the difficult circumstances in which it was carried out. She outlined that

- The presentation on priority action areas highlighted key issues from the community perspective.
- draft document did not reflect the 25 years of experience and knowledge that addressing the drugs issue through a partnership approach.
- the engagement by DATF Community Reps and the role of the Community Drug Projects is not reflected in the draft report
- it is essential to learn from and build on experience in order to move forward.

The LDATF Coordinators' Network sought to amend the draft minutes and clarified that the "Focused Policy Assessment of Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: An Analysis of expenditure and performance in drug and alcohol misuse" stated that "limitations in the availability and quality of data has constrained the conclusions that can be drawn". It was John Bennett's opinion from having been involved in Irish drug policy for over 25 years that these data limitations have been identified before and disappointing that they continue to be identified - restricting our understanding of the true impact of the work being done on the ground in local communities and the development of more effective policies.

The draft minutes were agreed, subject to the amendments being made.

Minister Feighan advised that there were matters arising from the last two meetings. It was confirmed that there were no items outstanding.

2. Strategic Priorities for *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery* 2021 – 2025

The Minister outlined his wish to strengthen the health-led approach to drug and alcohol use in the national drugs strategy in line with the Programme for Government. He pointed to the strategic priorities identified arising from the mid-term review, which were recently presented to Government. The priorities are aligned with government policies that focus on health care reform, local and community development, tackling homelessness, and community safety.

The Minister said that drug and alcohol use can only be addressed by working together across Government and with civil society, and invited officials to provide details in relation to the revised structures to support the implementation of the strategic priorities. Dairearca NíNéill and Jim Walsh presented on the revised structures supporting implementation of the Strategic Priorities 2021 – 2025. DoH acknowledged the short timeframe that members had to consider the contents of the paper which had been circulated and proposed that obs be returned by 8th October. Initial comments from members included:

Prof. Catherine Comiskey commented that communication is going to be particularly important and that sub-groups should contribute to the main agenda of the NOC and avoid silos.

Citywide said that the Civil Society grouping was a good proposal; a very positive one and that it would be important to engage with all reps. They advised that they would bring to their various networks and revert with observations. Officials offered to meet with the networks to clarify proposal, an offer which was accepted by the Community and Voluntary Sectors.

The D/Justice said their dept representative on the NOC could represent various divisions within the Department. They questioned the proposal for rotation between the AGS and Revenue and suggested that AGS should continue to have a role on the NOC.

The RDATAF Coordinators said they had some questions in relation to Civil Society representation, They represent the Task Forces and it is good to see that Reps are being included

from across the country. In regard to independent Chairs, will they be completely independent and have expertise in particular areas?

UISCE asked how can we embed the civil society proposal and said it would be important in the next two weeks to consider and “define the process” to enable leadership.

Asst. Commissioner John O’Driscoll followed up on D/Justice’s point saying that they should be represented on the same group. He said that Revenue has no role in Drug Institutions. However, they have a very specific role in relation to Drugs Enforcement. John O’Driscoll highlighted that Revenue are primarily involved in addressing issues relating to the importation of controlled drugs, while relevant functions undertaken by the Garda Síochána include much broader enforcement of the provisions of drug related legislation and, also, interaction with drug users on a regular basis, within their communities. The Garda Síochána are also represented on local drug task forces and other relevant *fora*. It is relevant, also, Revenue, is not situated within the Justice sector but, rather, come within the remit of the Department of Finance. The Garda Síochána does not, of course suggest that Revenue should not be represented on the Oversight Committee, but that they would not be in a position to present a Garda Síochána perspective on relevant matters, in circumstances where the Garda Síochána was no longer represented on the committee.

D/Housing, Planning & Local Govt. welcomed the emphasis on Civil Society.

Dr. Gerry McCarney said work should allow for a better focus on each of the priorities.

Dr Eamon Keenan, HSE, said that the SIG should not adopt an operation focus. He also queried the timing with the HSE national service plan 2022.

DoH officials advised that, in error, AGS and the HSE had been omitted from SIGs and this would be rectified. In response to a query about action plans, DoH officials outlined that the progress report and review identified action that had been completed, and identified/ proposed and the development of new actions going forward. It is important to give a sense of ownership to the SIGs. The SIGs would propose actions to the NOC for sign-off.

The LDATF Coordinators Network referred to the links between the Strategy and Task Forces. Jim Walsh said the the SIGs are the forum to build these linkages and gave an example of the

work done by the DRIVE project . The Irish Prison Service said this would be a comprehensive new plan with a Task Force on Mental Health being part of Groups 3 and 5. TUSLA asked that they would be included in SIG 2 & 4. . The Voluntary Drug Treatment Network would like to see more rural representation on the 6 SIGs. Dairearca encouraged everyone to send in their obs and comments by 8th October.

The RDATAF Chairs Network said there some questions with DPU from them. It was stated that DPU will respond over the next few weeks. Citywide asked that the MTR would be circulated prior to publication.

3 Operation TARA

Minister Feighan said some of the Committee will already be familiar with An Garda Síochána's Operation Tara, the goal of which is to protect communities from the scourge of illegal drugs. This operation is in line with An Garda Síochána's mission of "Keeping People Safe".

The focus of Operation Tara is to disrupt, dismantle and prosecute drug trafficking networks, at all levels, involved in the importation, distribution, cultivation, production, local sale and supply of controlled drugs. Minister Feighan invited Seamus Boland, Head of the National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, to present on Operation TARA. Operation TARA is a national policing priority designed to ensure Gardaí provide a coordinated approach to tackle drug related issues impacting on for local communities with renewed focus on targeting drug trafficking at local level. It's about protecting communities and working in partnership with all stakeholders continuing to engage in education & awareness such as Garda Schools Programme and Campus Watch in Universities, etc., for example during Freshers' Week and with media campaigns on social media. Drug Related Intimidation will also receive particular focus. It needs to be dealt with in as sensitive a manner as possible to try to tackle the scourge of drug dealing related intimidation and Inspectors with specific responsibility for the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme are appointed in all Garda Divisions.

The Local DATAF Coordinators' Network asked how will Community Policing Forums (CPFs) develop. Seamus said CPFs operate at a high level, they (Gardai) are basically "police for the

people” and will prioritise the policing needs of each individual community. A number of questions followed and Seamus responded by referring to what is regularly referred to as “recreational drugs” is actually the use of illegal and controlled drugs in a recreational environment, the dangers of using cocaine and the fact that most of the violence in this area has been experienced since 2016.

Regional coordinators highlighted the importance of the drug-relating intimidation reporting programme and that its effectiveness can be influenced by changes in AGS personnel. Tusla emphasized child and family support networks and early intervention pathways.

4 Updates

4a Early Warning Emerging Trends Sub-Committee

Anne Marie Seymour, Medicines, Controlled Drugs & Pharmacy Regulation, followed with a presentation on EWET. She discussed the increased use of pregabalin, nitrous oxides and cannabis edibles. There is also an ongoing increase in cocaine use.

A few questions followed in relation to fentanyl and nitrous oxide. Prof. Catherine Comiskey referred to two points from the EMCDDA. Firstly, they collect information on individual drugs and also have a role in polydrug use. Secondly, she did some research on cannabis edibles and pointed out that portion sizes vary from State to State. This is important to note for younger people.

In response to a question raised about the minutes, NOC secretariat reminded the member that agreed minutes of the EWET are circulated, but there is a timelag as the minutes need to be agreed by the EWET prior to circulation.

4b Update re National Drugs Forum

Brian Galvin advised members that the National Drugs Forum will be held on the 23rd November. It will be held online and the theme will be “Strategic Forecasting”. A lot of work has been done by Future Impacts with the EU Commission and EMCDDA.

4c EU Drugs Action Plan

Karen O'Connor, DPU gave an update on the EU Drugs Action Plan. The Action Plan was approved by the EU Council on the 22nd of June. It includes a timetable for the actions and outlines the responsible parties for actions. The Action Plan reaffirms a commitment at EU Level to a balanced and evidenced based approach to drug policy. It includes 3 policy areas, supply reduction, harm reduction and demand reduction. The Action Plan also includes lessons from Covid – 19.

Ireland welcomes with the focus on drug related deaths, in particular the action to consider an EU wide target for the reduction of drug related deaths. The Action Plan also focuses on Alternatives to Coercive Sanctions, building mechanisms for information sharing and research and foresight. There is considerable alignment with the strategic priorities in the National Drugs Strategy. At the HDG work has already commenced on implementing the action plan.

4d Estimates 2022

The final item discussed was Estimates 2022. Money was allocated in Budget 2021 which came to €10m approx. €7m of that money was transferred to the HSE recently. There were a few delays along the way, including the cyber attack. To reflect the priorities of the Drug Strategy, a detailed submission has been made for additional funding for 2022. It will however be a tighter financial situation this year.

The regional task force chairs noted the enhanced communication between the Dept and task forces arising from the MTR.

5 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Friday 3rd December 2021.

The list of attendees is at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Attendance:

Minister Frank Feighan
Ben Ryan
Eileen Leahy
Brenda Boylan
Anne Marie Seymour
Anne Murray
Conor Brennan
Richard Trimble
Paul Geraghty

David Kenny
Eamonn Waters

Jim Walsh
Asst. Commissioner John O'Driscoll
Seamus Boland
Dr. Eamon Keenan
Dr. Hamish Sinclair
Aisling Gillen
Caroline Jordan
Andy O'Hara
Rossa O'Fannaglan
Anna Quigley
Micheál Durcan

Brid Walsh

Dave Raftis
John Bennett

Margaret Nash
Mick J Lacey

Tony Duffin

Prof. Catherine Comiskey

Chair, Dept. of Health
Dept. of Justice
Dept. of Justice
Dept. of An Taoiseach
Dept. of Health
Dept. of Education and Skills
Dept. of Health
Revenue
Dept. of Rural & Community
Development
Probation Service
Dept. of Housing, Planning & Local
Govt.
Dept. of Health
An Garda Síochána
An Garda Síochána
HSE
HRB
TUSLA
TUSLA
UISCE Co-ordinator

Community Sector
Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force
Coordinators
Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force
Coordinators
Community Sector
Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force
Coordinators Network
Voluntary Drug Treatment Network
Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force
Chairs Network
National Voluntary Drug & Alcohol
Treatment Sector
Academic Expert

Dr. Gerry McCarney

College of Psychiatrists of Ireland

Presenters:

Dairearca NíNéill

Jim Walsh

Asst. Commissioner John O'Driscoll

Seamus Boland

Anne Marie Seymour

Brian Galvin

Karen O'Connor

Dept. of Health

Dept. of Health

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána

Dept. of Health

Health Research Board

Dept. of Health

Secretariat:

Dairearca NíNéill

Fiona Conroy

Gillian Treacy

Sinead Carson

DoH

DoH

DoH

DoH

Brian Dowling

DoH