

Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery

National Oversight Committee

Thursday 9th June 2022 at 2.30pm - from Room 7.04 and via Microsoft Teams

1 Introduction

Minister Feighan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and in particular, new members. He welcomed Karen O'Connor and said she had replaced Dairearca Ní Néill on the NOC. He said there was a blended format for the meeting today – both in-person and via Microsoft Teams. He remembered the late Eamon Corcoran, who he said had played a leading role on the NOC.

He said apologies had been received from Aisling Sheehan, Martina Shaughnessy, Rosemarie Tobin, Ciara Pidgeon and Anna Quigley.

The list of attendees is at Appendix 1.

2 Minutes and matters arising

A minor proposed amendment to the minutes had been sent to Sinead Carson by Tony Duffin, NVDAS and these will be incorporated into the minutes. The revised minutes will then be circulated to the group.

The draft minutes were agreed subject to matters being amended.

With regard to matters arising, John Bennett said the SIG meeting hadn't been arranged yet and it was important to set a date for this. Copies were circulated of the Draft Actions Table from 3rd March meeting. In relation to the proposed meeting with Dept. of An Taoiseach regarding Citizens' Assemblies, Jim Walsh said that while the meeting hasn't been held yet, he has sought a meeting with them.

3 Humanitarian response to Ukraine refugees – issues for drug & alcohol services

Seán O'hAdhmaill presented on this. He said Minister of State Feighan was working with Dept. of Health and the HSE to create a response. 34,500 Ukrainians have arrived in Ireland to date with the majority being in the 18 – 55 age profile and the majority female. A Weekly Humanitarian Senior Officials Group coordinates the government's humanitarian response to the Ukrainian crisis; scenario planning and a cross-departmental Daily Situation Report includes data on arrivals, accommodation, social welfare, education, health and employment. The Department collaborates with the HSE and internal units on issues, e.g. professional recognition of qualifications, mental health and disability supports. The National Ukrainian Arrivals Interagency Accommodation Transit and Processing Centre set up at Citywest includes health information, support with medical card queries and an individual health questionnaire as well as provision of prescriptions for existing conditions.

Prof. Eamon Keenan presented next on the Ukrainian response from the point of view of Addiction Services and the National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO). He said Ireland is welcoming Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) from Ukraine who are fleeing war in their home nation; a high percentage of which are women and children. Timely, accurate and simple translated communications about local and national health services are required. The general health of the Ukrainian population is low in EU terms with higher rates of chronic diseases and infections such as HIV, Hepatitis, TB, etc. Services for disability/prevention, etc. are in development while stress, anxiety and mental health issues are occurring as a result of invasion. A range of high-level structures have been set up to respond to the humanitarian crisis. These include the National Ukrainian Humanitarian Oversight Group and the National Ukrainian Response Oversight Group.

Andy O'Hara asked about medication and harm reduction measures. Health requirements are not being declared upon entry; host families are encouraging engagement with services. There is a potential fear of discrimination. Tony Duffin commented that Dublin airport is located in CHO9. He said that health advocacy adapted really quickly. Kate Gillen commented that this was a great learning curve. She said there are challenges in housing the people of the different services in the different regions. These lines of communication must be kept open.

4. NOC input on citizens assembly on drug use

Tadhg Fallon explained the background to the Citizens Assembly to consider matters relating to drugs use. His document had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. He explained the role of a Citizens Assembly and the timing. The Government has already established two concurrent citizens' assemblies; one on biodiversity and another on the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin. It is proposed that a Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use will commence following the conclusion of these two assemblies. It is anticipated that the membership of the assembly will consist of 100 persons as follows – a Chairperson appointed by Government and 99 citizens entitled to vote at a referendum, recruited at national level and randomly selected in accordance with best recruitment practice, as advised by industry experts in order to be broadly representative of Irish society.

Andy O'Hara commented that the underlying cause of drug use is not just the drug user – needs to focus on policy also. He also questioned who gets to appear on the Citizens' Assembly – is it just people on the voting register? This will cause drugs users to miss out and they need to feature on an Assembly for Drugs – it needs their voice. The selective process is quite random and a cross section of society is needed. Jim Walsh said he will revert to Dept. of An Taoiseach with these issues. Prof. Catherine Comiskey said we could look at a stratified sample. What about the under 18s or Traveller groups? Why should they be unable to contribute?

Tony Duffin said what is it that we're trying to answer? What is the question? What is the Drugs Assembly about? We're not at a point of understanding yet. How does the NOC feed into this? NOC needs to inform the Taoiseach's group about what should be in the Citizens' Assembly.

Mary Jane Trimble suggested the NOC come in as speakers. Fiona Fenton said the Chairs of the SIGs could do this. Bobby Smyth suggested that the questions that are asked of the citizens should be asked of all of us. In getting the views of the people of Ireland, it should not be exclusively legislation. It should be opinions and how one can do things better. Andy O'Hara talked about the experience of people who use drugs in this country and agreed with what Prof. Comiskey said earlier. Tony Duffin said one in three people will take drugs in their lifetime. Kate Gillen said that DECEDIY can advise and assist in getting children's voices/opinions across within the Citizens' Assembly.

5. Strategic Implementation Groups

Minister Feighan thanked everyone for their patience while these groups were established. The SIG Chairs outlined progress to date. The SIG groups are complete and ready to commence. A list of selected members for each group was circulated to NOC and at a later stage, a forum of all these groups is a consideration. There is great diversity in backgrounds, expertise and location among members.

Dr. Gerry McCarney has pencilled a first meeting for Wednesday 15th June – they start in earnest in September. His group will look at the Terms of Reference, the agenda and draft actions. Pat Bennett expressed his frustration at pace of structure. Fiona Fenton said it was her intention to hold a June meeting and Ciaran Reid sent a written update. Judge Ann Ryan has had to step down from her role and a replacement is being sought for her. Sarah Morton is intending to have a meeting soon – she said that two priority issues are in train. Margaret McCarthy said their member of SIG is Anne Murray. Peter Kelly raised the issue of nurse representation on the SIGs while Bríd Walsh referred to the need to keep momentum. Karen O'Connor said she would speak to Ciaran Reid after the meeting. Pat Bennett wondered what progress would be made say in women's groups from a good practice element and a funding point of view. It was pointed out that SIG 2 will have an oversight of that and that Reps will be the voices on the SIGs. Prof. Comiskey referred to the Research Data Government Board and said there might be some shared learning on this.

6. Irish Presidency of the Council of Europe – planned activities relating to drugs

Karen O'Connor presented on the Irish Presidency of the Council of Europe. Ireland currently holds the chair of the Committee of Ministers for the Council of Europe.

Ireland is a member of the Pompidou Group, which is the council of Europe's drug policy arm. Karen sits on the group as a permanent correspondent for Ireland. Over the last few years they have had some good engagement with the group both in sharing best practice and also engagement in joint projects.

To mark the presidency this year, they are highlighting 3 areas of work in relation to the Group.

- This year, they are hosting the first module of the Pompidou Group's yearly executive training in Dublin for the first time, this is running from the 21st to the 24th of June. Each year the Pompidou group holds **executive training** over the course of two modules in two separate member states throughout the year. The yearly training usually has a specific topic, this year's topic is substance use, addictions and online practices. There are a number of Irish representatives attending this training.
 - On the evening of the 22nd of June, we are hosting a welcome event with drinks and nibbles in the Department for the students and the Pompidou Group staff that will be with them - Minister Feighan has kindly agreed to address the attendees also, and we will also be issuing invites to all NOC members to attend the welcome evening shortly.
 - There will also be a strong Council of Europe emphasis at this year's National Drug Forum, which will be held on the 2nd of November. The event will have a broader Research focus but will link in with some excellent work led by the Pompidou Group. Further programme details will be released in due course.
 - An important piece of Pompidou Group work that was concluded this year will also be discussed during the National Drug Forum. The publication of a handbook entitled "[Implementing a gender approach in drug policies:](#)" is the result of a 2020-2021 online consultation involving 13 countries taking place during the Covid 19 pandemic.
 - The handbook aims to provide policy makers and practitioners in the drug field with evidence-based and operational recommendations to develop and implement policies and interventions that better integrate specific gender needs and support more gender equity.
 - Dr Sarah Morton who sits on this group was one of the main authors of this handbook and she ensured there was the inclusion of a strong Irish voice within the document.
- (a) **Regulation for an EU drugs agency** – Karen said she spoke at the last meeting briefly on the new regulation for a revision of the mandate of the EMCDDA to empower the future agency to address the new challenges more effectively, to better support Member States and to help improve the situation at international level.

Ireland took a prominent role in the negotiations of the EUDA regulation, and was able to include some recommendations received by Anna Quigley on the text, which were welcome.

The proposal was presented for the first time by the Commission to the HDG on 13 January 2022. Following this first general discussion, the HDG discussed the proposal at its meetings over the last 5 months under the French Presidency. The HDG reached an overall provisional agreement on the proposal. It was also agreed at COREPER on the 25th of May.

Ireland supports the compromise text, as all of our comments were taken on board. Furthermore, we are supportive of the level of ambition broader set out in the Regulation and hope for a swift adoption.

Karen then gave a brief overview of the state of play with this document at EU level.

- i) The European Parliament has not yet delivered its position at first reading. The dossier has been allocated to the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), whose rapporteur is Isabel Santos (S&D, PT).
- ii) The European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion at its plenary session on 18 and 19 May 2022.
- iii) The Committee of the Regions has decided not to issue an opinion on this proposal.

Once the text is agreed at council level, this agreed version of this text will be used as a basis for negotiations with the European Parliament under the ordinary legislative procedure. This legislative process will involve trilogue discussions between the council, where the HDG representatives will be represented by the Czech presidency, The European Parliament which will be represented by Isabel Santos and the Commission. It will likely take several more weeks/months. While Karen doesn't believe this will be particularly controversial, we can't know the scope of such changes yet.

(b) Departmental input for drug related expenditure – EMCDDA Reporting

Brian Dowling reported on this issue. DOH requested the assistance of NOC Departmental representatives in ensuring that their organisations completed the labelled expenditure annual

returns, which would be issued shortly by DPU, within the deadline given. The information gathered is used by the HRB to report back to the EMCDDA on drug related expenditure in Ireland.

(c) Dept of Children

Kate Gillen presented on this. Minister O’Gorman launched Supporting Parents, a national model for parenting support services, at the end of April. Supporting Parents takes a whole-of-government approach to improving supports for parenting. The vision of Supporting Parents is for all parents to be confident and capable in their parenting role, helping to achieve the best outcomes for children and families.

Supporting Parents also recognises that some parents, including those living with addiction, will need more intensive and tailored parenting support. We have some very good examples of services in Ireland that include a parenting element alongside addiction treatment. The model can be found on gov.ie

There are a couple of actions that may be of particular interest to the members of the oversight committee:

- DCEDIY will be establishing a Public Sector Parenting Support Network to share knowledge and raise awareness of the role of parenting support services in improving outcomes for parents and children.
- DCEDIY is also developing an Irish evidence matrix which will provide policy makers, funders and providers of services with easily accessible information about effective programmes. One of the outcomes categories will be preventing substance abuse. There will also be an opportunity for programmes currently used in Ireland to be considered for inclusion in the matrix.

(d) Community services enhancement fund

Brian Dowling reported on this. DOH in association with the HSE National Social Inclusion Office has developed and is currently finalising a Guidance document on the Community Services Enhancement Fund (CSEF). The overall aim of the CSEF is to enhance access to, and delivery of, drug and alcohol services in the community. The expected outcome is to improve health outcomes for people who use drugs and alcohol.

A recurring fund of €2m was announced in December 2021, up to €1.5m can be drawn down in 2022 and this will increase to €2.25m in 2023. 25% of funding has been ringfenced to increase access to and the provision of drug and alcohol services for women, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI+ community.

Funding will be distributed across all CHO areas who have devolved responsibility for allocating funding within their areas in line with the criteria specified in the Guidance.

It is anticipated that the Guidance will issue in the days following the meeting.

Early Warning Emerging Trends (EWET) Report

Conor Brennan reported on this. The HRB published on 8th June a report “Alcohol and other drug use among children and young people in Ireland: prevalence, risk and protective factors”. This was distributed by the HRB at NOC. Data is showing an increase in cocaine use and associated harms. The Motor Bureau of Road Safety reported some “designer” benzos appearing thanks to a new screening technique. Interpol’s Operation Pangea XV “week of action” takes place between 23rd and 30th June – the operation concentrates on, inter alia, falsified medicines being purchased online – Ireland will participate with HPRA as lead agency supported by Gardaí.

The National Drug Treatment Centre provided year-to-date data in relation to positive tests for cocaine, pregabalin and benzodiazepines. An Garda Síochána provided details of seizures, including benzos, amphetamines, nitrous oxide and crack cocaine. The HSE Addiction Services reported on aggression associated with tablets being sold as Tranax in the South Inner City.

Details were provided of the 2022 Festival Campaign. UISCE referred to June 26th Global Day of Action: The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking or World Drug Day, is marked on 26 June every year to strengthen action and cooperation in achieving a world free of drug abuse.

Sarah Morton enquired as to whether GHB is increasing in representation. The widespread availability of GHB and the policing aspect was discussed. While it's increasing in use as a party drug in the gay community, it's not being used as a date rape drug here in Ireland.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 1st September at 2.30pm in Room 704. The members are happy with the blended format.

Appendix 1

Attendance

Minister Frank Feighan	Chair, Dept of Health
Jim Walsh	Dept of Health
Siobhan McArdle	Dept of Health
Tadhg Fallon	Dept of Health
Brian Dowling	Dept of Health
Karen O'Connor	Dept. of Health
Sean O'hAdhmaill	Dept of Health
Mary Jane Trimble	Dept. of Health
Conor Brennan	Dept. of Health
Anne-Marie Seymour	Dept of Health
Dr. Basma Hasan (deputising for Dr. Devesh Singh)	Dept. of Social Protection
Dr. Eamon Keenan	HSE
Brian Galvin	HRB
Asst. Commissioner John O'Driscoll	An Garda Síochána
Kate Gillen	Dept of Children
Margaret McCarthy	Dept. of Education
Ciaran Reid	Chair, SIG
Dr. Sarah Morton	Chair, SIG
Dr. Gerry McCarney	Chair, SIG
Pat Bennett	Chair, SIG

Andy O'Hara	UISCE
Dr. Fiona Fenton	Chair, SIG
Prof. Catherine Comiskey	Ministerial Nominee
Brid Walsh	Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators
Tony Duffin	Ana Liffey Drug Project
Dr. Bobby Smyth	Ministerial Nominee
John Bennett	Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force Coordinators Network
Ben Ryan	Dept of Justice
Peter Kelly	
DOH Secretariat	
Karen O'Connor	Dept of Health
Gillian Treacy	Dept of Health
Sinead Carson	Dept of Health
Apologies	
Aisling Sheehan	HSE
Martina Shaughnessy	Dept. of An Taoiseach
Rosemarie Tobin	Dept of Housing
Ciara Pidgeon	Dept. of Children
Anna Quigley	Citywide