

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10:00am, Tuesday, 21 March 2023

Assessing the Feasibility of an Edinburgh Drug Checking Project

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Policy and Sustainability Committee:
- 1.1.1 notes the planned feasibility assessment and agrees to receive further reports on its progress.

Judith Proctor

Chief Officer, Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership

Contact: David Williams, EADP Programme Manager

E-mail: David.williams@edinburgh.gov.uk Tel: 07568130388



Assessing the Feasibility of an Edinburgh Drug Checking Project

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This paper responds to the motion passed by Council on [15th December, 2022](#) in which the council:
- 2.1.1 Notes with interest the Scottish Government Drug Deaths Taskforce's research and development into a Scottish drug checking programme, which is due to end in March 2023. This study aims to build evidence for and facilitate the development of a service in Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen.
 - 2.1.2 Understands the study involves the lived experience of people who use drugs, affected family members and a range of health professionals with the aim of assessing the key opportunities and barriers to providing a city-based drug checking service.
 - 2.1.3 Notes that drug checking services are increasingly viewed as an important public health intervention, with a global review in 2018 finding 31 drug checking services across 20 countries. 23 of which are in Europe, with others in South and North America, and Australasia.
 - 2.1.4 Understands that drug checking can be a tool to connect those who use drugs with relevant support and services to help them stop using drugs, or to reduce the harm experienced from using drugs. It can act as a linking point to substance use, housing, harm reduction, and a range of other services. Drug checking can also provide important benefits which extend beyond those who use the service. Furthermore, it provides opportunities for public health bodies to get a clearer picture of the drugs market and to tailor public health messages and approaches accordingly. In the event where particularly dangerous substances are detected, health warnings can be communicated to people who use drugs - both directly and via services working with the client.
 - 2.1.5 Agrees that drug checking services would increase Scotland's capacity to identify dangerous substances in circulation and would provide targeted warnings.

- 2.1.6 Recommits to a public health and social care harm reduction approach to drug use in the city.
- 2.1.7 Requests a report to Policy and Sustainability Committee on the publication of findings from the study exploring the implementation of an Edinburgh Drug Checking Service at the earliest possibility.”
- 2.2 In response to this motion, the (Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (EADP) has commissioned an assessment of the feasibility of Drug Checking in Edinburgh which will be delivered alongside the already commissioned feasibility assessment on Drug Consumption Rooms.

3. Background

- 3.1 As noted in the motion, Drug Checking is a harm reduction approach available in many countries but not currently unambiguously legal in the UK. It is in a similar, though not identical, position to Drug Consumption Rooms (DCR) – an intervention which would be highly compatible with ADP and Scottish Government (SG) strategy if:
 - 3.1.1 the local needs were clear.
 - 3.1.2 a suitable, cost-effective model could be identified.
 - 3.1.3 and the legal status was clearer.
- 3.2 Discussions on the legal status of the intervention are ongoing and pilots are being explored in other areas in Scotland and England ([The Scottish Drug Checking Project](#)). Exploring how it might be provided in Edinburgh is therefore potentially valuable and timely.
- 3.3 In line with a previous council motion, the EADP has commissioned a study Assessing the Feasibility of an Edinburgh Drug Consumption Room. As per the January 17 [update](#) to Policy and Sustainability Committee, this contract has been awarded to a consortium of providers lead by Stirling University.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The delivery of the feasibility study for Drug Checking Services in isolation would be a substantial undertaking and might be considered lower priority than the DCR work already underway. However, it is very closely aligned to that work, with a similar research approach, background knowledge and subject matter expertise required.
- 4.2 The team delivering the DCR study are exceptionally well positioned to take on this additional work (having led the study referenced in the council motion above) and the ADP has agreed to fund the additional component of that research. This has now been incorporated as a subproject in the DCR contract. See appendix 1 for a summary of the intended work.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Reporting on the sub-project will be in line with the delivery of the DCR study, with an initial report based on desk based research expected to come to the Policy and Sustainability Committee on 6 June 2023 and a summative report including the results of local consultation and recommendations to the Policy and Sustainability Committee in September 2023.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The cost of the additional work is £15,000 which is being met by the EADP.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 This is to be identified in the course of the study.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [The Scottish Drug Checking Project](#)

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Edinburgh sub-project on Drug Checking

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The primary aim and purpose of this project is to assess the need for, and views on, the establishment of drug checking services in the city of Edinburgh, as part of a wider commissioned 'parent' project on drug consumption rooms.

This sub project will use an existing national project, funded by the Drug Deaths Taskforce/Scottish Government/Corra Foundation, to create an Edinburgh 'case study' report using slightly amended research documentation. It will involve drawing on Stirling team members' knowledge and existing research on drug checking as part of the literature review and needs assessment being undertaken as part of the DCR work. It will also incorporate primary data collection via qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10-12 individuals in Edinburgh city on how drug checking might reduce the risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses in the city. Interviews will include a range of stakeholders including people who use drugs, affected family members, decision makers and service staff to inform the assessment of need and most effective models of care.

The Stirling team have already undertaken a review of the international evidence to identify models of care and service guidance and specific work on the policing and prosecution challenges that exist for drug checking services. This can be brought into the wider drug consumption room project and outputs (interim and final report). The Stirling team have created a Community of Practice, including an online information hub hosted by Crew2000, for those interested in drug checking to share good practice. This resource will be extended to Edinburgh through, for example, invitations to key stakeholder events/webinars.

The research ethical approval process for the qualitative research at University of Stirling will start immediately and involve Chair's action to grant approval for the extension of the national drug checking work to Edinburgh. Slight amendments will be made to the participant information sheets, consent forms and interview schedules. The project is 'Covid-proofed' with staff set up to work completely from home and data collection can be conducted remotely rather than face-to-face if necessary.

Reporting on the sub project will be in line with the delivery of the DCR study, with an initial report based on desk based research expected to come to the P&S Committee 6 June 2023 and a summative report including the results of local consultation and recommendations to the P&S committee in September 2023.