

Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 March 2017



Update on Novel Psychoactive Substances

Report of Gill O'Neill, Interim Director of Public Health

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide supporting information to Members in advance of a presentation on Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) to the Committee's meeting.

Background

2. At its meeting in June 2016, the Committee agreed its work programme and requested to include an item on Novel Psychoactive Substances following changes to legislation. Outcomes of this topic are linked to the Safe Durham Partnership and Council Plans objective of 'Alcohol and substance misuse harm reduction'. The presentation will also build upon a report titled 'Novel Psychoactive Substances' that presented to the Committee's meeting June 2015.
3. Novel psychoactive substances are often inaccurately known as 'Legal Highs' and are a range of synthetic drugs that have come onto the drug scene since 2008/09. They were originally manufactured to replicate the effect of illegal substances like cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy and containing research chemicals, medicines, food supplements. This rendered them outside the remit of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Changes in Legislation

4. The Psychoactive Substances Act came into force on 26 May 2016. With the advent of the Act it is now illegal to produce, supply, or import novel psychoactive substances for human consumption, including for personal use. Possession for personal use is not an offence, unless in prison. Excluded from the Act are legitimate substances, such as food, alcohol, tobacco, nicotine, caffeine and medical products from the scope of the offence, as well as 'poppers' and controlled drugs, which continue to be regulated by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.
5. Within this context Jane Sunter, Public Health, Durham County Council and officers from Durham Constabulary's Harm Reduction Unit will be in attendance at the Committee's meeting to provide a presentation on

understanding the threat of psychoactive substance usage within the County and partnership work on implementation of the act and addressing this threat.

Recommendations

6. Members of the Committee are asked to note information contained within this report and presentation and comment accordingly.

Background Papers

None

Contact: Jane Sunter, Public Health Portfolio Lead Tel: 03000 266 897

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – None

Staffing – None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – Information within this report is linked to the objective of 'Alcohol and substance misuse harm reduction' within the Altogether Safer element of the Council Plan and Safe Durham Partnership.

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement – None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None