

Section E: Protecting the community from drug-related crime and re-offending

There are a variety of estimates of the real extent of drug-related crime and offending – and of the relationship between drug use and offending behaviour. While there is a strong correlation between drug use and certain crime types, the profile of substance use and criminal behaviour in the UK is changing. Accordingly while there is still a population of individuals who are undoubtedly committing crime solely in order to fund their drug habit, there also appear to be large numbers of offenders where the relationship between their criminal behaviour and their drug use is less clear. We need to develop a better understanding of this in order to effectively tackle crime.

How we define drug-related crime is important too. Some crimes – mainly the acquisitive ones, usually without violence, are strongly related to the need to acquire funds to buy drugs. Other crimes – often violent crimes like assault, the range of hate crimes like domestic violence and racially motivated assault and property crimes like criminal damage and disorder offences are often related to intoxication and disinhibition.

A recent presentation at the British and European Societies of Criminology given by Alex Stevens and Peter Reuter identified problems with the assumption at the heart of current strategy - that of causality in the drug-crime link. Current strategy proposes that a large proportion of crime is directly caused by drugs and that the majority of harm caused by drugs is related to crime. This, they said, ignores the complexity of crime causation and the other influences on drugs and crime. In particular they were concerned about the reliance on support for this assumption on the behaviour and reporting of the small cohort of offenders who are arrested. In addition, they questioned the effectiveness of treatment in preventing criminal activity. We know that

the peak age of offending is many years before average age of treatment initiation and that only a small proportion of offenders enter treatment. This would seem to indicate that even the expected impact of the expansion of treatment on crime of 4% based on NTORS may be ambitious. In conclusion they suggested that the reliance on this data from uncontrolled studies could at best utilise "short term reductions to make long term predictions".

DrugScope believes that if this is the case, while it may be an interesting research area or basis for a series of pilots, it by no means represents the kind of convincing evidence on which we would want to rest the whole of our national strategy. Many of the anecdotal reports we received during our consultation bore this out. In particular services described to us a revolving door of treatment, where the same offenders came back again and again. Workers told us that many of the people with whom they were working would probably be "bang at it [offending] anyway". This was said to be a particular feature of people using stimulants and alcohol who were reported to be an increasing presence at the front end of treatment services since the introduction of test on arrest and mandatory assessment.

20. What are the most effective ways of reducing drug-related crime and re-offending?

Clearly the provision of effective interventions through the criminal justice system with power to work coercively if necessary is critical in order to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. However, the imposition of traditional drug treatment programmes on prolific offenders, where the relationship between their criminal activity and their drug use is correlative rather than causative, may not be effective in getting them to stop offending.

Current efforts through the DIP programme seem largely aimed at the range of acquisitive crimes. Here there have been a number of

successes over the past three years for a large group of individuals who would not otherwise have accessed drug treatment. They have been able to get into treatment, their drug use has become more stable or it has stopped and they have stopped offending.

However many drug services lack the resources, expertise and specialist input required to deal adequately with offending behaviour that does not fit into this traditional pattern. **DrugScope** recommends that we adopt a more sophisticated approach to diversion on arrest and utilise more mainstream probation style programmes which focus on the offending behaviour rather than the substance use, or which focus on managing intoxication – particularly from stimulant or alcohol use - as opposed to managing the economic impact of opiate use. It may not be appropriate to locate all or indeed any of these interventions within drug services.

Accordingly, **DrugScope** welcomes the intention of government to align the Prolific and Priority Offenders Programme with the Drug Interventions Programme and hopes this will enable greater flexibility in the deployment of interventions that will tackle offending behaviour as well as drug use.

In line with concerns about alcohol related offending, **DrugScope** welcomes proposals from the Home Office to explore interventions through a programme of regional demonstration projects identifying alternatives to custody.

21. What is the best way of ensuring that all partners are engaged in dealing with drug-related crime?

22. What is the best way to determine and agree local priorities and strategies?

For partners to engage there must be something for them to engage with. Local understanding of and determination of priorities in terms of

drug-related crime is a critical issue. Using the new Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) national standards framework, local priorities can be identified and a plan of action decided upon. Local partnerships can then identify how they might best tackle the different kinds of substance use related crime and what interventions are appropriate to their needs.

23. How can local communities better work together to tackle drug-related crime?

Both CDRPs and LAAs should have in place formal and informal consultation structures to enable local communities to influence and contribute to the full range of local strategies and to contribute to them to tackling drug related crime.

There are also opportunities through structures like Police Community Forums and Police Authorities to have an impact on local crime prevention.

24. Are existing funding and delivery structures effective or do changes need to be introduced (in order to truly embed programmes like DIP into ‘business as usual’)?

Currently DIP is commissioned and funded through a distinct budget line. If DIP is to be fully embedded in “business as usual’ then the funding strand will need to either be brought into the Safer and Stronger component of the LAA or included in the Pooled Treatment Budget. Given the inequity in DIP funding across the country however, which is a serious issue of contention – particularly for non intensive DIP boroughs which border intensive DIP boroughs - the Government may wish to encourage boroughs to bid in partnership for enhancements to existing treatment systems to improve performance.

As discussed above, bringing DIP interventions into the range of options for local partnerships to explore may also create a more flexible and equitable system to extend and mainstream this area of work.

25. How can commissioning and co-commissioning arrangements best be applied to the whole drug strategy, and what role should regional offender managers and other stakeholders (e.g. primary care trusts, local authorities and the Department for Work and Pensions) have in commissioning and co-commissioning drug treatment for offenders?

Please see question 24.

26. Proposals to provide statutory provision on release for offenders with prison sentences of less than 12 months have been deferred. In their absence, are there arrangements – other than DIP – that could help to provide continuity of care on release for this group of drug-misusing offenders?

DrugScope believes that the government should reinstate plans to provide statutory provision on release for all offenders with no delay.