

Have you got what it takes?

Tackling drugs



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Important facts

There is a strong link between drug use and offending. Offenders who regularly use heroin or crack cocaine are estimated to commit around 45% of all acquisitive crime.

Recent Home Office research found that heroin/crack cocaine use could account for at least one-half of the rise in acquisitive crime in England and Wales up to 1995, and between one-quarter and one-third of the fall to 2012. This was because those persons who started using heroin or crack cocaine in the late 1980s and early 1990s became older, received treatment, ceased using drugs or died.

There is strong evidence of the benefits of drug treatment and the significant impact it has in reducing crime and reoffending as well as improving public health, reducing the spread of blood borne infections and preventing drug-related mortality.

The Home Office Drug Treatment Outcomes Research Study found that for every £1 spent on treatment, an estimated £2.50 was saved and treatment was found to be cost-beneficial in 80% of cases for the Criminal Justice System.

The social and economic costs of drug supply in England and Wales is estimated to be £10.7 billion a year – just over half of which (£6 billion) is attributed to drug-related acquisitive crime.

Over half of the organised crime groups operating against the UK are involved in drug-related crime.

Tough enforcement is a fundamental part of the Drug Strategy and the police and other law enforcement agencies continue to make real progress in tackling the supply of illegal drugs, and in reducing the harm they cause. This includes robust action to stop drug traffickers from profiting from the drugs trade through cash seizures, asset forfeitures, money laundering prosecutions and civil or criminal recovery prosecutions.

We work closely with all law enforcement agencies to ensure they have the available resources and powers to make the UK a challenging environment for drug suppliers and organised crime groups.

Background

The Government will continue to build on the balanced Drug Strategy launched in 2010, **'Reducing demand, restricting supply, building recovery: supporting people to live a drug-free life'**, and tackle drugs as a key driver of crime.

The 2010 Drug Strategy includes comprehensive action to: reduce the demand for drugs to prevent use in the first place and intervene early with those that do develop problems; restrict the supply of drugs by tackling drug dealing on our streets, strengthening our response at the border and combating the international flow of drugs to the UK by disrupting drug trafficking upstream; and build recovery by supporting individuals to recover from dependence through timely and effective treatment and local services, which encompass housing, employment and appropriate support to maintain a stable family life and a life free from crime.

PCCs have a pivotal role in tackling drugs and joining up with wider delivery services to take a smarter approach to drug-related offending across whole systems. For example, the interface between health and criminal justice is crucial in improving identification, assessment, and referrals into appropriate interventions, such as treatment, as early as possible.

There are promising signs our approach is working – with a downward trend in drug use over the last decade, a declining trend in the number of heroin

and crack cocaine users and more people recovering from their dependency now than in 2009/10.

Legal Framework

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, along with the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001, provide a legal framework for the control of dangerous or harmful drugs. They implement the UK's international obligations on drug control and respond at a domestic level to drugs of concern, such as khat and anabolic steroids.

In response to the challenges experienced with new psychoactive substances, the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 complements the 1971 Act, allowing us to implement a more complete response to the supply of harmful drugs.

There is no simple solution to the drugs problem. Strong views are held by the public and stakeholders on how best to tackle drugs, including the view that drugs – or some drugs – should be decriminalised for personal use.

The Government's position is clear – decriminalisation would not eliminate the illicit trade in drugs, nor would it address the harms associated with drug dependence, including the misery, cost and lost opportunities that dependence causes individuals, their families and the wider community.

More information

Psychoactive substances (previously called 'legal highs')

On 28 January 2016, the Psychoactive Substances Act received Royal Assent. The

Act creates a blanket ban on the supply of psychoactive substances. These were unhelpfully known as 'legal-highs'. This landmark Act bans the sale, supply, production and distribution of psychoactive substances for human consumption and gives police and local authorities greater powers to tackle this harmful trade. We expect to commence the Act in the Spring.

We are also taking forward a comprehensive action plan on psychoactive substances to enhance our response to prevention, treatment and information sharing. For example, we have launched a toolkit to help local areas prevent and respond to the use of psychoactive substances and published clinical guidelines to aid in the detection, assessment and management of psychoactive substances users.

What is Drug Testing on Arrest (DTOA)?

Drug testing on arrest (DTOA) is a powerful tool to identify individuals who misuse specified Class A drugs: heroin and/or cocaine/crack, the drugs most commonly associated with acquisitive crime. DTOA may only take place following arrest or charge for a 'trigger offence' or where a police officer of at least the rank of inspector has authorised the sample to be taken.

Testing on arrest will identify people misusing specified Class A drugs earlier in their contact with the criminal justice system, so that individuals may be steered away from crime and into treatment at the earliest opportunity.

Following a positive test, there are also legal sanctions for those unwilling to address their drug misuse and drug-related offending.

Cannabis cultivation

Growing cannabis, whether for personal use or organised supply, is illegal and those who do so can face significant jail sentences.

Our aim is to make the UK as hostile an environment as possible for criminals growing cannabis by attacking their profits and driving up the risks. The police are using proactive operations and seizures to target dealers and the organised gangs behind illegal cannabis farms.

The Government has worked with a number of other partners, including energy companies and the property sector, to promote cooperation and sharing of best practice to tackle cannabis farms.

All types of property may be affected, and therefore our engagement with the sector includes trade associations representing privately rented housing, social housing and letting agents.

The report published by the National Police Chief's Council entitled UK National Problem Profile: Commercial Cultivation of Cannabis Report 2014 presents an analysis of the current threat from commercial cannabis cultivation and provides evidence to assist future planning and decision making for preventative and enforcement activity. (<http://www.npcc.police.uk/Publication/FINAL%20PRESS%20CULTIVATION%20OF%20CANNABIS%202.pdf>).

For further information please see the link below:

Drug Strategy and annual reviews:
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/drugs/drug-strategy-2010