

National Assembly for Wales

Health and Social Care Committee

Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”)

Evidence from South Wales Police – LH 01

Our Strategic Drugs Group began as a New Psychoactive Substances Steering Group in 2012 in response to the complex emerging issues we were experiencing in many areas of our force, particularly Swansea, Barry and RCT/Merthyr. This group has now evolved to incorporate all elements of drug misuse although the membership has remained constant and the NPS market is a priority area of business for the group. Representation on the group is made up of South Wales Police officers from drug prevention/offender management, drugs enforcement and force intelligence including TARIAN and its experience of Organised Crime Groups together with an All Wales Schools Liaison Programme Co-ordinator. The group also includes ‘external’ partners such as Rhian Hills from the WG, Dr Fiona Brookman, Professor of Criminology, University of South Wales, WEDINOS and local treatment providers.

One of the initial aims of the group was to raise awareness amongst our police colleagues (neighbourhood and response officers, custody staff including arrest referral workers and Health staff) and young people, parents and teachers of the risks associated with this emerging drugs market. We have delivered 8 training sessions to SWP staff and partners from the fire and ambulance services, Local Authorities and prisons using Liam Watson, Drugs Education Training which were extremely well received. The group also acts as a conduit for information on drug policy up-dates and intelligence between the ACPO Drugs directorate, Home Office and the ECMD out to local policing teams, Local Authorities and key partners.

The All Wales Schools Programme has now developed a number of information packs on new and emerging drugs for pupils, teachers and parents. These can be accessed on the SchoolBeat.org website. The Programme will also share information they receive with the group and the officers working on the Programme – example attached.

Our Drug Interventions Programme staff, including arrest referral teams working in police custody suites, have all now received training in this field to enable them to broaden their remit beyond Class A drugs and alcohol. They deliver brief interventions in custody for those where NPS use has been a factor in their offending and for those requiring further support, will refer them on either into their criminal justice treatment service (DIP) or to local Health and community treatment provision.

When carrying out their assessments in police custody suites, the arrest referral workers complete a questionnaire designed by our force intelligence analyst team which has enabled us to scope the impact NPS use has on offending behaviour and how local drug trends and markets are changing. The force crime analysts undertake twice-yearly debriefings with DIP arrest referral workers and case-workers to feed their community-based knowledge and understanding from working with NPS users into the Intelligence Directorate Analysis NPS Survey and Quarterly Drugs Market Report.

I trust this brief overview demonstrates the commitment South Wales Police, with its partners, is making to co-ordinating an approach to help understand and address the complex issues around NPS use. We are grateful for the support Rhian Hills has given the group from its inception bringing local and national harm reduction initiatives to our attention and the recent report produced by Dr Fiona Brookman has certainly added to our understanding of this market. This is attached for your information.