



**National Assembly for Wales' Health and Social Care Committee -
Inquiry into alcohol and substance misuse.**

The effects of alcohol and substance misuse on people in police custody.

Gwent Police Response-

1.1 Whilst police custody figures can provide a useful perspective on the prevalence of drug or alcohol misuse in the population, they are subject to a significant number of biasing influences. These influences can range from simple logistics - the number of officers available to patrol and make arrests – to the effect of such debates as whether hospital or custody is the right place for someone suffering from the ill-effects of alcohol misuse. This means that the figures must be approached with caution and any conclusions drawn should be tentative.

1.2 Gwent Police made approximately 16,000 arrests in 2013, this contrasts with approximately 14,000 in 2014. Broadly, the figures show the same trends in alcohol and substance misuse across the period. There were 800 arrests for being drunk and disorderly in a public place in 2013 (about 5% of the total), which is approximately equivalent to the anticipated 550 (about 4% of the total) for 2014, taking into account the decrease in overall detainee numbers.

1.3 This is reflected in the returns for the number of people arrested for driving whilst above the legal limit for alcohol, some 700 in 2013 against 500 in 2014. Again, these are not significantly different when overall numbers are considered.

1.4 When considering trends in drug misuse, the arrest numbers for possession of controlled substances are very low. Cannabis remains the drug most commonly possessed and is about 3 times more prevalent than any other drug when considering the number of people arrested. In 2013 arrests for possession of Amphetamine and Cathinone derived substances were approximately equivalent and about double that for possession of either Heroin or Cocaine.

1.5 2014 has seen arrests for Amphetamine, Cathinone derived substances and Cocaine all drop significantly. Arrests for Heroin possession have remained about the same. That said, the dataset is too limited to allow any conclusions to be drawn from these apparent variations and they are more likely to result from differences in officer numbers or behaviour than from any actual variation in behaviour on the part of the drug-using population in Wales. Significantly more data would be needed to support any conclusions.

1.6 The final area where custody figures can reflect on the questions at hand is in the risk assessments made by custody staff when considering detainees brought before them. Custody sergeants are required to assess the demeanour of detainees on their arrival at the custody facilities and this assessment includes whether the detainee is apparently intoxicated or not. In 2013 some 17% of detainees, for all offences, were recorded as displaying intoxication, whether from drink or drugs. In 2014, this increased to about 27% of all detainees arrested. Again, it would be inappropriate to draw firm conclusions from such a limited dataset – which is as likely to derive from changes in local recording practices as any other factor - but it would be interesting to see whether this was reflected in results from the other three Welsh forces.

Collated by Insp Nick McLain, 07/01/15.