

## **Reducing Drug Related Litter in Southampton Scrutiny Inquiry - Conclusions and Recommendations**

Conclusions were drawn from each meeting and disseminated to the Panel. All of the reports, presentations and minutes from the inquiry meetings can be found here:

<http://www.southampton.gov.uk/modernGov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=668&Year=0>

### **Conclusions**

- The inquiry has identified that drug related litter is an issue of concern in Southampton that, despite not appearing to be as pervasive as in some other cities, is creating an element of fear, damaging the reputation of certain communities, and presents a potential health risk, particularly to the people who inject drugs and those working with people who inject drugs and clean-up drug litter.
- The Panel understand that the position in Southampton compares favourably to some other cities partly due to the effective and proactive work of services delivered by the Council, and partners, to limit the impact and prevalence of drug litter. In particular the Panel recognise the essential role played by the City Council's cleaning staff clearing drug litter from public places.
- The Panel, when considering best practice, were re-assured that many of the recommended approaches to tackling drug related litter are already being implemented in Southampton, including needle exchange services, effectively sharing information with partners and the prompt cleansing service response to finds.
- New initiatives designed to improve outcomes relating to the number of people rough sleeping, living in unsecure accommodation, and consuming illicit drugs in the city were welcomed by the Panel. It is recognised that these initiatives, in conjunction with existing approaches, will help to contribute to a more sustainable environment to reduce levels of drug litter in Southampton moving forward.
- The Panel expressed concerns that, whilst understanding the decision to close Grosvenor Square Car Park overnight, this could, if not supported by additional measures, potentially lead to the displacement of drug litter to other locations in the city that do not benefit from such regular cleansing. This could therefore present a greater risk to the public.
- The Panel would therefore welcome further analysis of drug litter finds since the night time closure of Grosvenor Square Car Park to better understand the link between car park closure and the location of drug litter finds in the city. This should help to inform future decisions relating to the night time closure of additional city centre multi-storey car parks.
- Information was also presented to the Inquiry Panel by representatives from residents' associations and the Needle Exchange, raising concerns relating to the difficulty reporting incidence of drug related litter to the Council. The concerns primarily focussed on finding out how to report it through the

Council's website. Opportunities therefore exist to improve the reporting processes, making it easier and clearer for members of the public.

- When considering alternative evidence based approaches to reducing drug related litter the Panel consider that the installation of discrete public sharps bins, near to locations where drug litter is a consistent problem, would have a beneficial impact on levels of drug litter in Southampton.
- There are currently no public sharps bins in the city and needle exchange services are not open 24 hours a day. Whilst all Panel Members are in agreement that it is never acceptable to irresponsibly dispose of drug litter, people who inject drugs understandably, for a number of reasons, do not want to carry used needles around with them.
- A logical approach therefore is to make it as easy as possible for people who inject drugs to do the right thing with their used equipment by installing discrete public sharps bins in appropriate locations, and communicate their existence to users through the needle exchange services.
- The final initiative considered by the Inquiry Panel was the potential to establish a drug consumption room in Southampton. The Panel understand that drug consumption rooms have been evidenced to be effective at decreasing public injecting and reducing drug related litter, and, especially when accompanied by the provision of Heroin Assisted Treatment, can also provide additional benefits relating to, for example, reducing harm and engaging people who use drugs in support services.
- Drug consumption rooms are currently illegal in the UK. If they were permitted they could be a local intervention, working in conjunction with, and not at the expense of existing services, responding to the needs of the local drug-using population.
- Whilst the Panel in principle support the establishment of drug consumption rooms, and the positive impact it could have on drug related litter, the Panel recognise that any policy decision would need to be supported by a robust evaluation to fully assess the demand, benefits and value for money of such a facility in Southampton.
- This approach would also need to include working in partnership across local government, providers and with other partners to lobby the Government for a change in legislation relating to drug consumption rooms.

### **Recommendations**

Reflecting the key findings and conclusions the following actions are recommended to reduce drug related litter, and the impact of drug related litter in Southampton:

- 1. Displacement of drug litter** - Undertake analysis of drug litter finds since the night time closure of Grosvenor Square Car Park to better understand the link between car park closure and the location of drug litter finds in the city. This information should then be used to help inform future decisions relating to the night time closure of additional city centre multi-storey car parks.

- 2. Make it clearer how to report drug related litter** - To encourage public reporting, review the location and content of information on the Council's website that explains how to report drug litter and what to do if you find drug litter. This information should be made available to community groups who organise and undertake litter picks.
- 3. Extend opening hours of the Southampton Needle Exchange** – To make it easier to dispose of injecting equipment, when recommissioning needle exchange services extend the opening hours of the Southampton Needle Exchange, to include weekend opening, and provide needle exchange services from the Cranbury Avenue Day Centre.
- 4. Signpost out of hours services** – To raise awareness, include the location and opening hours of the out of hours needle exchange services on the Council's website, on appropriate needle exchange forums, and request that the information is signposted on the outside of the Southampton Needle Exchange.
- 5. Public sharps bins** – Following informed consideration of potential sites and designs, pilot the locations for discrete public sharps bins where drug litter is a persistent problem. Information relating to the effectiveness of the sharps bins should be analysed and the whereabouts of the pilot public sharps bins should be communicated to people who inject drugs through the needle exchange services.
- 6. Drug consumption rooms** – Undertake a robust evaluation to fully assess the potential benefits a medically-supervised pilot drug consumption room could bring to Southampton. The evaluation should include consideration of the potential impact on drug related litter, health and criminal justice outcomes, public finances and whether a facility would add value to current services. The provision of Heroin Assisted Treatment from a drug consumption room should also be factored into the analysis, as well as the safety and security of staff.
- 7. Drug consumption rooms** – Working in partnership with local authorities, representative bodies, providers and other organisations that support the position, lobby the Government for a change in legislation relating to drug consumption rooms, enabling local commissioners of drug treatment services to commission the establishment of such facilities if local need is evidenced.