

<b>Title of Report:</b>  <b>Northern Ireland's new Alcohol and Drug Strategy</b>	<b>Officer Presenting: Director of Health and Community</b>  <b>Author: Head of Health and Community Wellbeing</b>
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## **1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations**

- 1.1 To advise Members that the Department of Health has launched Northern Ireland's new alcohol and drug strategy which outlines a new Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use (2021-31).

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 This strategy replaces the previous substance misuse strategy – the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol & Drugs Phase 2 (NSD Phase 2) – endorsed by the former NI Executive and launched in 2012.
- 2.2 The strategy was produced as a specific commitment arising from the New Decade New Approach agreement to publish a successor strategy to NSD Phase 2 and was prioritised by the Department of Health both in response to that commitment and also as a key element in response to the Executive's overarching Programme for Government. It also has direct links with the Executive's strategic framework for public health, Making Life Better, and with the new Mental Health Strategy.

## **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The aim of this new 10-year Substance Use Strategy "Preventing Harm & Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use" is to prevent and reduce the harm related to substance use in Northern Ireland. This strategy has been co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders – government departments and agencies, health professionals, community and voluntary sector representatives; as well as service users and their families.
- 3.2 The Strategy has considered:

- 3.2.1 co-occurring mental health and substance use services;
  - 3.2.2 reducing Stigma and increasing the involvement of Service Users;
  - 3.2.3 a more holistic and flexible joined up service that supports people throughout their recovery journey;
  - 3.2.4 tackling waiting times and improving transition between services;
  - 3.2.5 focus on prevention as well as treatment;
  - 3.2.6 increasing support for young people and families – including addressing Hidden Harm;
  - 3.2.7 reinforcing workforce development, including on early identification and brief interventions; and
  - 3.2.8 not losing the focus on Alcohol which remains the most significant drug of choice for citizens across NI.
- 3.3 This work cannot be done in isolation and has benefited greatly from the work being done around the development of the new Mental Health Strategy and the work on suicide prevention.
- 3.4 While the strategy will be Health-led, many of the actions in this strategy cut across the work of other departments and thus the strategy has been approved by the Executive and will require cross-departmental implementation.
- 3.5 This strategy sets out our proposals for tackling the harms caused by substance use over the next ten years. The vision is that:
- 3.6 People in Northern Ireland are supported in the prevention and reduction of harm and stigma related to the use of alcohol and other drugs, have access to high quality treatment and support services, and will be empowered to maintain recovery.
- 3.7 The strategy also sets out target groups believed to be most at risk of harm – those who are homeless; those who inject drugs; and those who are in contact with the justice system.
- 3.8 There are five specific outcomes to help improve services for and tackle the harms around substance use. These are:

- 3.8.1 Outcome A – Through Prevention and Reduced Availability of Substances, Fewer People are at Risk of Harm from the Use of Alcohol & Other Drugs across the Life Course;
  - 3.8.2 Outcome B – Reduction in the Harms Caused by Substance Use;
  - 3.8.3 Outcome C – People have Access to High Quality Treatment and Support Services;
  - 3.8.4 Outcome D – People Are Empowered & Supported on their Recovery Journey; and
  - 3.8.5 Outcome E – Effective Implementation & Governance, Workforce Development, and Evaluation & Research Supports the Reduction of Substance Use Related Harm.
- 3.9 Specific governance groups will be established by the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency / Health and Social Care Board to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy and monitor the impact of the 57 actions at strategic, regional and local levels. Service users and Community and Voluntary Sector representatives will be involved at all levels in these governance bodies.
- 3.10 The Department of Health will provide regular updates on the progress of the actions within the strategy.

## **4 Implications**

### **Equality, Rural Needs, Climate Change and Data Protection**

- 4.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

### **Financial, Legal, HR, Improvement and Other**

- 4.2 There are no implications in relation to this report at this time.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 That Members note the contents of this report.

## **Background Papers**

Appendix 1: The new strategy is available on the DoH website at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/substance-use-strategy-2021-31>