

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain - The Government's 10 Year Strategy for Tackling Drug Abuse.
FROM: Jim Dickie Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 6 October 1998	
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REF: JD/GMCI/JMCF	

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise the Social Work Committee of the publication of the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain" and the strategy for dealing with same.

2 WHITE PAPER STRATEGY

2.1 The White Paper sets out a ten year strategy for tackling drug misuse. The strategy has four main aims:

- i) to help young people resist drug misuse in order to achieve their full potential in society
- ii) to protect communities from drug related anti-social and criminal behaviour
- iii) to enable people with drug problems to overcome them and to live healthy and crime free lives
- iv) to stifle the availability of illegal drugs on our streets.

2.2 In addition to the White Paper, a guidance booklet was published simultaneously which is designed to support and illuminate the strategic direction of the strategy. The guidance booklet is aimed at individuals, groups, and organisations which have responsibility for implementing some or all of the aspects of the White Paper.

3 GUIDANCE

3.1 The guidance booklet sets out a range of evidence and information for developing the strategy. It covers a number of relevant topics which are summarised as follows:

3.2 The Drugs Problem - The Context

◆ **Economic and Social Context**

It is indicated that the causes of drug misuse are many and varied. Drugs should not be seen in isolation. Problem drug misuse can be linked explicitly with other social problems such as unemployment, homelessness and social exclusion.

◆ **Availability**

World-wide production of drugs, particularly heroin, cocaine and cannabis is continuing to increase in the short and medium term, with expansion in new growth areas.

◆ **Consumption**

In the population aged 16 - 59 an estimated one in ten may be using illegal drugs every year and one in twenty every month.

Drug misuse amongst school children is increasing and they are taking drugs at an earlier age. Around one in twelve 12 year olds, one in three 14 year olds and two in five 16 year olds have tried drugs at least once. Males generally outnumber females in terms of different types of drug misuse, but the gap is closing considerably in the 16 - 29 group.

◆ **Health**

The effects on health of drug misuse can be wide-ranging but no drugs are free of risk. There is more evidence about health consequences of some drugs than others and in some cases the evidence is complicated by the use of more than one drug.

◆ **People Seeking Help**

Home Office data indicates that there is a steady rise of all cases (new and notified) from 24,703 in 1992 to 43,372 in 1996 across the UK.

◆ **Deaths**

The number of drugs related deaths has risen from 1,399 in 1993 to 1,805 in 1996, though these figures probably under report the true extent of the mortality associated with drug using lifestyles. There is some research to show that the death rate amongst opiate misusers is nearly twelve times that of the general population.

◆ **Crime**

There is research evidence to show that there is a strong but complex connection between drugs and crime. However, care is required when interpreting the results of specific surveys on their own.

4 TACKLING THE PROBLEM

4.1 The guidance booklet in addition to putting the drugs problem in context, maps out a range of good practices which have been devised and information on what works in tackling drug misuse. A number of these matters are worthy of the Social Work Committee's attention.

4.2 **Helping Young People**

Prevention should start early, with broad life-skills approaches at primary school, and built on over time with appropriate programmes for young people as they grow older via youth work, peer approaches, training and wider community support.

A number of projects which have been established throughout the community are highlighted, particular mention is given to Community Athletics 2000 in North Lanarkshire.

4.3 **Protecting Communities**

Helping drug misusing offenders to tackle their drug problems and become better integrated into society has significant impact on levels of crime. Research indicates that treatment programmes linked to the criminal justice system can work.

4.4 **Enabling People with Drug Problems to Overcome Them and Living Healthy and Crime Free Lives**

The National Treatment Outcome Research Study (NTORS) is producing comprehensive evidence of the effectiveness of four treatment models, (residential rehabilitation, in-patient treatment, structured methadone and methadone reduction) in reducing drug misuse, risk taking behaviour and criminal activity, and improving health. The Effectiveness Review reported that counselling and other approaches to address the broader social problems are an important part of treatment.

Developing good outreach which can make contact with young people to ensure they are adequately informed of the risks of their current behaviour.

Controlled prescribing by doctors of drugs to help users deal effectively with withdrawal from heroin, tranquillisers and alcohol.

4.5 **Stifling the Availability of Illegal Drugs on our Streets**

Stifling the availability of drugs on our streets requires that all agencies with a remit to tackle supplies from source and transit through national distribution networks to local dealing requires a corporate approach to this objective.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The White Paper, "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain" and the accompanying guidance notes outline a comprehensive approach to the problem of drug misuse. Many of the issues highlighted in the document can be applied in a North Lanarkshire context. Indeed many of the positive practices are already operational.

5.2 The Social Work Department is currently conducting a review of its Addiction Strategy. The White Paper and the guidance will be of significant importance in helping to shape the addiction policy which will shortly be recommended to Committee for approval.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Committee is requested to note the report.



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17 September 1998

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