

Scottish Government submission of 27 March 2023

PE1986/B: Provide testing kits for drugs in public spaces

The Drug Checking research project, funded by the Drug Deaths Taskforce, had originally been due to complete in March 2023 but has now been extended until May 2023, following which we expect to receive their final 3 reports which will be published if accepted by peer review. The reports will focus on the use of self-testing kits.

However, detailed plans for each city's Point of Care testing facilities have been submitted to the Scottish Government along with information about how they might operate. This identifies each city's plans of work to the point of submission of license applications.

In advance of the research work concluding, an Implementation Group has now been established and the process and timings for implementing drug checking in Scotland will be a priority for that group. This group will draw upon the expertise and experience of members in order to progress this work as quickly as possible. It is important to note, however, that there is no specific timeframe from the period of application submission to the license being issued as this is a matter for the Home Office.

The Drug Checking Research project has already published two papers, linked below:

- [Challenges for Drug Checking Services in Scotland: a qualitative exploration of police perceptions](#)
- [A Realist Review of How community-Based Drug Checking Services Could be Designed and Implemented to Promote Engagement of People who Use Drugs.](#)

It is important to note that the license applications for drug checking facilities are not being submitted by the Scottish Government, rather these are being taken forward by leads from each of the three pilot cities involved.

Each city is in the process of developing their license application but in order to proceed with the submission to the Home Office there are particular requirements relating to their chosen sites which each area must fulfil. These include carrying out building renovations alongside security and equipment upgrades. These modifications are required to be completed prior to the submission of an application to the Home Office. It is anticipated that applications for two of the services will be completed and submitted by the end of April with the final application expected to be submitted before the summer.

Ideally, in order to make these facilities as available as possible to people using substances we would be able to provide mobile testing sites, festival and front of house testing at nightlife venues as well as testing facilities within existing services and stand alone drug checking. However, due to licensing requirements from the Home Office we are limited as to what we are able to proceed with. In discussions with the UK Government they have been clear as to the kind of facility they would consider appropriate for providing this type of service and as a result license applications will be submitted for facilities which will be fixed sites and which will be predominately focussed on people with problem substance use.

This is not what the research has indicated as being the optimum type of service but, due to the need to apply for Home Office licenses, we are hampered to an extent in what we can provide.

Initial testing will be conducted at the city sites with information being issued to the client alongside harm reduction advice, but the sample will also then be sent to the National Hub situated within Dundee University. Here the sample will be further analysed and will have potential to provide real-time information about drug trends and possible dangerous substances which are in circulation. This vital information will be linked and shared with RADAR, the Public Health Scotland early warning system. This will enable vital information to be disseminated to the correct services, issuing alerts to warn those people who use drugs with essential information.

Each of the Point of Care sites will be housed within an already established facility. The facilities have links to other health services. Dundee and Aberdeen will be situated within already established Drug and Alcohol services that have existing links in assessment and preparation for detox/rehabilitation, supporting the maintenance of abstinence, dried blood spot testing and overdose prevention and

Naloxone training, as well as further links to one to one support and recovery agencies. Integration into existing services has been identified as important for engagement with other services and allows relationships to be built upon with staff which are vitally important for people who use drugs.