

**Criminal Justice; Health, Social Care and Sport; and Social Justice and Social Security Committees**  
**Thursday 20 February 2025 (Session 6)**

## **Introduction**

This briefing has been prepared for a cross-committee meeting between Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. The evidence session will consider the [report by the People's Panel on drugs deaths and drugs harm](#) which was published on 20 January 2025.

The Committee will take evidence from two panels of witnesses:

### **Panel 1**

- **James Allan**, People's Panel Member
- **Helen Douglas**, People's Panel Member
- **Mairi McIntosh**, People's Panel Member
- **Alex McKinnon**, People's Panel Member
- **Alison Weir**, People's Panel Member

### **Panel 2**

- **Neil Gray MSP**, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
- **Laura Zeballos**, Deputy Director Drugs Policy Division, Scottish Government
- **Maggie Page**, Unit Head Drugs Strategy, Scottish Government

The following paper provides background information on the People's Panel, the recommendations which came from their report, a summary of the Scottish Government's response to that report (the full response is contained in Paper 1) and suggested themes for questions.

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14 February 2025

## People's Panel on drug deaths and drugs harm

### What is a people's panel?

A People's Panel is a form of public engagement, which brings together a randomly selected and broadly representative sample of the population to learn about an issue, discuss it, and make recommendations.

People's Panels empower citizens to actively contribute and deliberate on key issues, enhancing Parliament's scrutiny with innovative, informed citizen input and strengthening the Parliament's reputation for delivering inclusive democratic participation.

### People's panel on drug deaths and drugs harm

The Scottish Parliament held a People's Panel on tackling drug deaths and drugs harm over two weekends (25-27 October and 15-17 November 2024) and an additional two online sessions on 6 and 12 November 2024. A summary of the process and outcomes is outlined below, with further detail to be found in the [People's Panel report](#) published on 20 January 2025.

The Panel consisted of 23 randomly selected members from across Scotland. Panel Members were aged between 16 and 74 years old and broadly reflected Scotland's demographics in terms of gender, age, region, ethnicity, disability, educational level, and attitudes towards drug harm.

The Panel considered the following question:

#### ***What does Scotland need to do differently to reduce drug related harms?***

In order to answer this question, the panel heard evidence on the background to drug deaths and drugs harm, looked at what the Scottish Government is currently doing and learned about a range of measures and approaches from across the drug treatment and recovery sectors.

The deliberative aspect of the sessions involved panel members working in small groups to consider the evidence they had heard using the following questions:

- What is working well?
- What is not working?
- What could be done differently to improve things?

After the panel members had heard evidence on the background and context to drug deaths and drugs harm in Scotland, they then heard overviews of, and held discussions on, the following seven themes:

- Participation, rights and lived experience
- Justice and drug law reform

**CJ/S6/25/7/2**  
**HSCS/S6/25/5/2**  
**SJSS/S6/25/6/2**

- Access to treatment and care and support
- Prevention
- Tackling stigma
- Harm reduction programmes
- Workforce

From these seven themes the panel members chose four which they wished to explore further, and hear more evidence on, during the second weekend. The first four themes in the list above were those chosen by the panel to consider in greater detail. The Panel engaged with a range of expert witnesses, including those with lived experience of drug deaths and drugs harm, across these four themes.

An [overview of slides presented to the People's Panel](#) across both weekends is available on the Scottish Parliament website.

While all but one of the recommendations relate to the four chosen themes, the Panel were not restricted to only providing recommendations on these areas and one relates to harm reduction.

## **Recommendations**

The [People's Panel report](#) contained a collective statement and 19 recommendations across five different themes. The recommendations are set out below, with further detail on these and the statement available within the report.

The Scottish Government fully accepted 13 of the recommendations, accepted five in principle, and noted that one related to the work of the Cross Committee rather than the Scottish Government. Their position in terms of each recommendation is noted in brackets after the recommendation below.

### **Participation, rights and lived experience**

#### *Recommendation 1 (Accepts in principle)*

The Human Rights Bill needs to be passed by Parliament before the Parliamentary session ends and should incorporate the *Charter of Rights for People Affected by Substance Use* (published December 11, 2024).

#### *Recommendation 2 (Accepts)*

More people with lived experience should provide ongoing support and aftercare in the statutory workforce.

#### *Recommendation 3 (Accepts)*

**CJ/S6/25/7/2**  
**HSCS/S6/25/5/2**  
**SJSS/S6/25/6/2**

There needs to be appropriate anti-stigma training for staff across all public bodies, and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships led by and delivered by those with lived/living experience. National training guidelines should be improved and rolled out over multi-sectors and covering all sections of recovery.

*Recommendation 4 (Accepts)*

The pay and fair working conditions of people with lived experience needs to be equitable with that of equivalent public sector workers in the drug and alcohol field. There needs to be consistent financial support and training for the workforce, especially for support workers and people with lived and living experiences.

**Justice and law reform**

*Recommendation 5 (Accepts in principle)*

All services should be able to refer to each other eg police, courts, third sector and NHS. Funding needs to be diverted to support this.

*Recommendation 6 (Accepts)*

There needs to be continuation and consistency of de-penalising minor drug offences and not imprisoning people for short periods. This would involve maximum use of drugs courts and/or drug testing and treatment orders with a streamlined assessment and referral process for services.

*Recommendation 7 (for the Cross Committee)*

The Cross Committee should consider further action to look at the increase of drug supply in the prison sector.

**Access to treatment and care and support**

*Recommendation 8 (Accepts)*

There needs to be a well-publicised single point of access for specialised advice & support relating to alcohol and drug problems (like NHS 111, Childline or Samaritans), or an alternative provided by a non-government body e.g. Third Sector.

*Recommendation 9 (Accepts in principle)*

There needs to be Scottish Government action to ensure all public and third sector services are enabled and supported to share information including the justice system. All bodies must have an information sharing agreement in place which is GDPR compliant and includes service user consent, and all staff must be made familiar with this.

*Recommendation 10 (Accepts in principle)*

**CJ/S6/25/7/2**  
**HSCS/S6/25/5/2**  
**SJSS/S6/25/6/2**

There needs to be a guaranteed and protected five year minimum period of funding for community and third sector services, including assessment and evaluation.

*Recommendation 11 (Accepts)*

The MAT standards should be extended to cover all drugs causing harm.

## **Prevention**

*Recommendation 12 (Accepts)*

Drug education should be included in the mainstream curriculum (curriculum for excellence) from P5 – P7 and onwards. It should be based on the European Prevention Curriculum – or similar approach.

*Recommendation 13 (Accepts)*

In order to ensure drug harm education is properly implemented in the curriculum there needs to be engagement with parents, guardians, carers and the teaching profession regarding age-appropriate content and application.

*Recommendation 14 (Accepts)*

There needs to be financial support and provision for external organisations such as CREW & Clued Up to support education in schools and outreach in communities to encourage peer learning on drug harm issues. These kinds of services need to be accessible at a national level.

*Recommendation 15 (Accepts)*

Where evidence proves positive outcomes, relevant services should move from a zero-tolerance approach to a high tolerance approach, where appropriate for each individual.

*Recommendation 16 (Accepts)*

There needs to be an equitable expansion of employability support for people in recovery including mainstream courses and apprenticeships that includes more sectors. There must be safeguards put in place to ensure equitable pay and conditions and stop the risk of exploitation.

*Recommendation 17 (Accepts)*

There needs to be continued support for people in recovery, such as supported temporary accommodation and key workers, following referral to services.

**CJ/S6/25/7/2**  
**HSCS/S6/25/5/2**  
**SJSS/S6/25/6/2**

*Recommendation 18 (Accepts)*

There needs to be urgent examination of the issues around poverty - including but not limited to homelessness and those suffering financial deprivation as a result of life changing events - with input from all relevant agencies including third sector and input from a people's panel.

**Harm reduction, tackling stigma and workforce**

*Recommendation 19 (Accepts in principle)*

There needs to be an additional public awareness campaign on the distribution and use of naloxone.

## **Scottish Government response to the People's Panel report**

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care provided a formal response to the People's Panel report to the Convenors of this Cross Committee. It is published in full in Paper 1. A summary of the key points from this response are set out below:

- The Scottish Government fully accepted 13 of the recommendations, accepted five in principle and noted that one referred to the work of the Cross Committee rather than the Scottish Government.
- The majority of the recommendations are already being undertaken within the National Mission and cross-government programmes of work. Those that are not already being progressed will be incorporated into considerations for the Scottish Government's post-National Mission planning.
- The Human Rights Bill will be introduced in the next parliamentary session, subject to the outcome of the 2026 election. The Charter of Rights was published on 11 December 2024, with many of these rights already in law.
- The Scottish Government will launch and support the following:
  - a 'Guiding Principles' document setting out how employers can best support employees with lived and living experience of substance use
  - two 'Employability Support Toolkits' to support those with lived and living experience to pursue careers in the substance use sector
  - a Drugs and Alcohol Workforce Knowledge and Skills Framework for those supporting people to address their substance use challenges.
- Scottish Government officials have carried out initial engagement with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service around the feasibility of a further expansion of drug courts.

**CJ/S6/25/7/2**  
**HSCS/S6/25/5/2**  
**SJSS/S6/25/6/2**

- The Scottish Government intend to legislate for improved information sharing through Part 2 of the National Care Service Bill (Section 36). Stage 2 of the Bill is expected to be completed by 28 March 2025.
- The Scottish Government's Fairer Funding pilot aims to provide organisations of eligible funded activity with advanced notice of their grants. They also have a commitment to provide 2-year funding to eligible grantees. Details of the organisations whose grants are included in the 2-year funding pilot can be accessed at Annex A to this [letter](#).
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland have been commissioned by the Scottish Government to establish regional improvement hubs to design and improve pathways into, through and from rehabilitation. They are preparing Self-Assessment Thematic Analysis reports for 29 Alcohol and Drug Partnerships which will highlight key areas for improvement.
- The Scottish Government is developing a Population Health Framework, to be published in Spring this year, which will consider what more can be done to mitigate against the social and economic drivers of ill health.

## Suggested Questions – Panel 1

### Collective Statement

1. In your collective statement you said there requires to be a cultural change across Scotland and that the Scottish Government must be brave and bold. Can you tell us a bit more about what you mean by that – what specific action would you like to see by the Government for them to be seen as being “brave and bold”?

### Theme 1 – Participation, rights and lived experience

2. You made two recommendations relating to those with lived experience in the workforce – to increase this and make sure there is equitable pay and fair working conditions of these workers. Can you tell us about how you think this should be done to ensure this is not the “tick box exercise” you speak about in your report?
3. You called for appropriate anti-stigma training for staff. Why do you think this is so important, and what do you think should be done to make sure this takes place?

### Theme 2 – Justice and law reform

4. You made three recommendations under justice and law reform, with one being that all services should be able to refer to each other and funding should be provided to support this. What evidence did you hear that this is not taking place currently and what are the barriers to this?

### Theme 3 – Access to treatment, care and support

5. You called for all public and third sector services to be enabled and supported to share information, including the justice system. Could you tell us why you made this recommendation and what needs to be done to support this?
6. You also called for the MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) Standards to cover all drugs that are causing harm not just opiates. Can you tell us more about the evidence you heard for why this was needed and the difference this could make?

### Theme 4 - Prevention

7. You made three recommendations under the theme of prevention which related to education. Could you say a bit more about why the panel felt it was important that drug education is included in the mainstream curriculum and why financial support and provision for external organisations to support education in schools and outreach in the community is also necessary?



8. You made a recommendation that there should be continued support for people in recovery following referral to services so that people avoid a 'cliff edge'. How do you think the Scottish Government and others could ensure that this support is in place?
9. You highlighted poverty as one of the fundamental contributors to drugs harm and deaths but noted that the "enormity of this challenge goes beyond our remit". What would you like to see the Scottish Government and others doing to address this issue?

#### **Theme 5 – Harm reduction**

10. You called for there to be an additional public awareness campaign on the distribution and use of naloxone. What do you think could be an effective way of doing this?

## **Suggested Questions – Panel 2**

#### **Collective Statement**

11. The People's Panel's collective statement notes that "the same conversations keep happening, with the same actions being agreed but not enough has been implemented". It goes on to recognise that there has been some progress but that there "is not nearly enough action". What is your response to that?

#### **Theme 1 – Participation, rights and lived experience**

12. The People's Panel made two recommendations under the theme of participation, rights and lived experience which related to lived experience in the workforce. Can you advise what the Scottish Government are doing to ensure that employing those with lived experience is not simply a 'tick box exercise' and that there is equitable pay and fair working conditions for this group compared to equivalent public sector workers?
13. The People's Panel recommended that the Human Rights Bill be taken forward in this Parliamentary session in order to support the implementation of the Charter of Rights for People Affected by Substance Use. Could you advise the Committee why you do not feel the Bill requires to be introduced in this session to support the implementation of the Charter of Rights which was published in December last year, and how will you ensure the Charter is implemented?

#### **Theme 2 – Justice and law reform**

14. The People's Panel recommended that all services should be able to refer to each other and that there should be the funding in place to allow this to happen. In your response to this recommendation, you state that the Scottish Government "will explore this further to better understand the specific barriers the court service and police have in referring to third sector organisations". Could you provide the Committee with some more detail about what will be involved in this?

### **Theme 3 – Access to treatment, care and support**

15. The People's Panel recommended that there needs to be a well-publicised single point of access for specialised advice and support relating to both drug and alcohol problems (such as a recognisable number like NHS 111). While you list different directories and contacts in your response to the report, this can still seem like a complex landscape with no one way of accessing advice or support. Can you advise if the Scottish Government is doing anything to address this complexity by providing a single point of access as recommended by the panel?
16. The People's Panel recommended that the MAT Standards cover all drugs causing harm, not just opiates. You state in your response to the report that you are "giving consideration to future application of the standards". Could you provide the Committee with some more detail around this?
17. The People's Panel recommended that there was a guaranteed and protected five-year minimum period of funding for community and third sector services. Could you provide the Committee with some more detail on the Fairer Funding pilot you mentioned in your response to the People's Panel report, and if the Scottish Government intends to go further than their current commitment to provide 2-year funding to eligible grantees?
18. The people's panel noted the importance of information sharing between public and third sector organisations. They heard that a report called a 'single shared assessment' available to the NHS and third sector was proposed but not implemented. Do you have any information on why this was the case and could you provide the Committee with more detail around how information sharing will be addressed by the National Care Service Bill, as you advise in your response to the People's Panel report?

### **Theme 4 - Prevention**

19. The People's Panel recommended that there was an urgent examination of issues around poverty. In your response to their report, you advise that the Scottish Government is developing a Population Health Framework, to be published in the spring, that will consider what more can be done to mitigate against the social and economic drivers of ill health. Could you provide the Committee with some more information on this?
20. The People's Panel made a number of recommendations around drug education. What is the Scottish Government's view on including drug education in the mainstream curriculum for P5-7 onwards as recommended by the panel? Do you

feel there is sufficient funding for external organisations to support drug education in schools and outreach in communities?

21. In your response to the People’s Panel report you note that the Scottish Government support (either directly or via ADPs) a number of high tolerance/low threshold services. Do you believe that there are a sufficient number of these services or are more required, and if they are needed would the Scottish Government support any expansion?

22. In your response to the People’s Panel report you mention improvement hubs that are being established by Healthcare Improvement Scotland to design and improve pathways into, through and from rehabilitation, as well as Self-Assessment Thematic Analysis reports that will highlight key areas for improvement. Could you provide the Committee with some more detail around this work and any timescales?

**Theme 5 – Harm reduction**

23. The People’s Panel called for an additional public awareness campaign on the distribution and use of naloxone. You state in your response to the report that you will “further consider this recommendation and discuss with partners”. Could you provide any more detail to the Committee around what this might involve and a timescale?