

IN TYNWALD

19 July, 2022

Statement in relation to the review of harms caused by illicit substances

Mr President

By way of context in December 2020, Tynwald resolved that:

“Tynwald is of the opinion that the Island’s approach to tackling the harms caused by illegal drugs should be informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Drugs and Alcohol undertaken by the Government in 2017; and that the Minister with responsibility for Justice should bring forward a report to Tynwald no later than June 2021 setting out how a review of the Island’s approach to the harms caused by illegal drugs could be undertaken.”.

Following this resolution my predecessor brought a report by the Council of Minister’s Substance Misuse Steering Group to Tynwald in June 2021. That report outlined how a review of the Island’s approach to the harms caused by illegal drugs could be undertaken.

Following a debate in June 2021 Tynwald resolved that:

“Tynwald approves the proposed approach for a review of the harms caused by illegal drugs set out in the Report on a proposal for a review of the harms caused by illicit drugs; and agrees that further information on the likely costs and timescales for such a review be submitted to Tynwald no later than October 2021.”

Mr President I am pleased to announce, that in line with that resolution after much consideration, this review will be undertaken by the Public Health Institute at John Moore's University.

The Public Health Institute already works with Public Health in the Isle of Man to undertake a number of public health related surveys and research and are acknowledged as experts in the field of public health policy development in relation to illicit drugs. They also carried out a similar exercise in Guernsey in 2020.

The Terms of Reference for the Review reflect the approach agreed by this Honourable Court in June 2021.

The review will examine indicators of substance use and related harms in the Isle of Man, with a specific focus on cannabis. The review will provide evidence that can be used to inform broader aspects of drug policy in the Isle of Man.

The research undertaken will provide an overview of the prevalence of drug use in the Isle of Man, and indicators of drug-related harm. Based on previous academic work undertaken by the Public Health Institute, and others, for example, the States of Guernsey and the Irish Government, the review will examine the interaction between health and criminal justice systems with respect to drug use, and how alternative approaches to possession offences - including non-punitive approaches - could be used to promote the health and wellbeing, and safety, of people who use drugs, and of the wider community.

The three core objectives are:

1. To provide an overview of the drugs situation in the Isle of Man, including a review of substance use prevalence, harms, and treatment and criminal justice activity;
2. To understand public understanding and support for responses to cannabis and other drug use, including existing approaches and other (non-punitive) policies designed to reduce drug related harm; and
3. To carry out public and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of drug policy in the Isle of Man.

Honourable Members, the original resolution asked for the likely cost of the review. It is not appropriate for me to provide specific details but I can confirm that a bid to the Seized Asset Fund for £120,000 has been approved which includes the cost of the review and also provision for public consultation and legal resource to support wider policy development.

The review will commence shortly and will be delivered by September 2023. Following this it is our intention to bring policy options forward to this Honourable Court for January 2024.

I apologise for the delay in returning to this Honourable Court with further details of this review. However, I do believe that the time was needed to ensure the approach was correct and following final procurement we could be clear on timescales. I also recognise that the timescales for this review are quite long, but as I set out to this Honourable Court during the debate on the Island Plan in February this review is vital to start to enable us to have the data, and a clear evidence base, to properly inform a wider debate on drugs policy.

Thank you Mr President