WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE: INQUIRY INTO ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE

The Welsh Government invests more than £50m annually to deliver our 10-year substance misuse strategy, *Working Together to Reduce Harm 2008-18* and the specific commitments within the associated substance misuse delivery plan for 2013-15. This substantial investment recognises the devastating impact substance misuse has on individuals, their families and our wider communities.

Continued Welsh Government support, coupled with the work of our external partners in the statutory and third sectors, is having a demonstrable impact on services and outcomes for those whose lives are affected by substance misuse. We have seen an overall trend of improvement to reported waiting times for those accessing substance misuse treatment services over the last 5 years and latest statistics, report reductions in both alcohol and drug related deaths in Wales. Statistics, released in September 2015, show a 30% reduction in drug related deaths in Wales since 2008 which is testament to the actions being taken in Wales to support this challenging agenda.

**Recommendation 1**
*That the Deputy Minister for Health sets out steps to address the misuse of steroids and image enhancing drugs in the next Welsh Government Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018).*

**Response: Accept**

Tackling the harms associated with steroids and image enhancing drugs remain a priority for the Welsh Government. The forthcoming Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 will set out the next steps we will be taking to further educate individuals of the risks involved in using these drugs in order to reduce future use.

The Welsh Government has undertaken substantial work in collaboration with Public Health Wales to address the harms caused by steroids and image enhancing drugs (SIEDS): These include:

1) The launch of a national steroids and image enhancing drugs educational toolkit for young people. Intended to delay / prevent initiation of the use of SIEDs, the toolkit includes a series of educational and awareness raising workshops exploring issues such as the health risks and associated harms of use, influences and trends in body image, and common myths. The toolkit has been designed for a variety of youth and educational environments and has been tailored to allow for flexible delivery and use to suit individual need. As such the kit contains lesson plans, facilitator’s
notes / information, and web-links to printable resources and accompanying film clips to support onward delivery of each workshop.

2) The development of a website to provide reliable and evidence based information and advice to reduce the harms associated with these drugs. The website provides a plethora of information, including videos surrounding risks and harms.

3) Developing and delivering training throughout agencies across Wales, including the identification of SIEDs leads within agencies.

4) Undertaking a harm reduction campaign throughout July and August 2015 via radio and social media with specific emphasis on the transmission of blood borne virus and encouraging individuals to be tested.

**Recommendation 2**
That the Deputy Minister for Health sets out how he has taken into account this report and its recommendations when he publishes the draft Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018).

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government welcomes the Committee’s report which is being used to inform the development of the new Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18. Where appropriate, the Committee’s recommendations are being incorporated into the actions within the new Plan. We are also taking into account the views of a wide range of partners and service users as part of a series of consultation workshops held recently together with the updated evidence base.

**Recommendation 3**
That the Deputy Minister for Health explores ways of encouraging more GPs to specialise in the field of alcohol and substance misuse so that each GP cluster has access to this expertise.

**Response: Accept**

Working closely with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards and Local Health Boards, the Welsh Government will encourage GPs (and other primary care professionals) to undertake the RCGP substance misuse certificates Part 1 and 2 and to specialise in substance misuse. We will review the existing provision and budgets across Wales and target cluster areas that do not have access to such expertise to explore how additional training could meet local need.

In addition, the Welsh Government will continue to make its Substance Misuse Bursary Scheme available to Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards to support
the development and training of the substance misuse workforce across all sectors, including primary care.

**Recommendation 4**
That the Deputy Minister for Health works with the Deanery to review the alcohol and substance misuse training provided to GPs, both for trainee GPs and as part of continuing professional development. This review should include: tackling prejudice and negative attitudes (where they exist); identifying clear pathways for referring patients; and improving diagnosis.

**Response: Accept**

We will continue to work with the Deanery, the RCGP and others to ensure that the alcohol training available to GPs is relevant, evidence based and remains fit for purpose. This includes regularly evaluating the need for this training amongst GPs and the wider workforce and updating the content of the relevant programmes in light of new or emerging trends.

**Recommendation 5**
That the Welsh Government’s primary care plan should include measures for making primary care services more accessible to people suffering from alcohol and substance misuse issues.

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government’s national plan for a primary care service aims to improve access to GP services and, through the GP contract for 2015/16 and 2016/17, for GPs to develop the local multi disciplinary teams needed to improve the coordination and quality of care and optimise the availability of professional skills. Through the cluster networks GPs will also be encouraged to participate with health board community networks and other service users to improve the coordination and quality of care for people suffering from alcohol and substance misuse issues.

Meeting the needs of people affected by substance misuse is not just about access to GP services. The primary care plan reflects our aim to improve access to the wider primary care team which is underlined through our new primary care workforce plan. The plan is based on evidence that the most effective way to meet people’s needs is to identify these needs and plan and deliver care at a very local level through the 64 primary care clusters, which draw in all those people, services and organisations which can help. For people with substance misuse needs, this will include drawing in those services and organisations which make up the Area Planning Boards. As such, we are encouraging Area Planning Boards to develop strengthened relationships with primary clusters within their region in order to influence and inform cluster plans.
In addition there are 207 community pharmacies in Wales which offer a needle and syringe exchange programme. This enables pharmacists to engage with those who inject substances and provide crucial harm reduction advice and information. We have also worked closely with the Welsh Centre for Pharmacy Professional Education, developing e-learning to up-skill pharmacists’ knowledge surrounding the misuse of over the counter and prescribed only medicines.

**Recommendation 6**
*That the Welsh Government develops information targeted for people experiencing alcohol and substance misuse issues that will promote the range of services provided in primary care and improve perceptions.*

**Response: Accept**

Our national Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline (DAN 24/7) is a free and bilingual telephone helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information and/or help relating to drugs and alcohol. The service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The helpline provides information online through the DAN 24/7 website and information leaflets where requested.

Information provided by DAN includes services within primary care to ensure individuals are aware of all services available and to make an informed choice on a service to best suit their needs.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with DAN 24/7 to ensure that information is provided about the range of services available within primary care.

**Recommendation 7**
*That the Deputy Minister for Health undertakes a review of alcohol brief intervention (ABI) training, and sets out a strategic approach to promoting and monitoring the effectiveness of the training.*

**Response: Accept in part**

The Alcohol Brief Intervention (ABI) programme has previously been reviewed as part of the Public Health Wales Transforming Health Improvement Programme (THIP). The review found that there is good evidence of effectiveness for brief interventions and the Welsh Government is currently working with Public Health Wales to develop a more strategic approach to delivering brief interventions in line with the current evidence and recommendations in THIP. This will include a robust training package being delivered to a range of services including primary care. There will be a number of actions within the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 on the continued development of ABI, including trialling the programme in the workplace.

**Recommendation 8**
That the Welsh Government reviews the guidelines for GPs and pharmacists to reduce the potential for overprescribing and over-supply, improve patient monitoring, and ensure that, where appropriate, there is an exit plan for patients.

Response: Accept

The All-Wales Prescribing Advisory Group (a sub-group of the All-Wales Medicines Strategy Group) will be asked to consider the evidence submitted to the Committee, identify any gaps in current guidelines and develop further guidance as appropriate during 2016.

The Welsh Government’s independent Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse is also currently reviewing the harms associated with prescription only analgesics; part one of this review, which focuses on tramadol, will be reporting next month. The recommendations from this review will be considered by the Welsh Government and, where appropriate, be incorporated into the new substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18.

Recommendation 9

That the Deputy Minister for Health ensures that the next Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018) reflects the need to establish the extent of, and take action to address, alcohol related brain damage.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has taken a number of steps to begin to understand and address the growing problem of Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) in Wales. These have included:

1) Commissioning two reports, one from Alcohol Concern Cymru and one from Public Health Wales. These reports made a number of recommendations about prevention, early detection; diagnosis and engagement; treatment and support; and establishing a robust evidence base. The PHW report also provided some evidence on the scale of, and services in place for, individuals with alcohol related brain damage.

2) Ensuring clinicians across Wales are aware of NICE guidelines outlining steps to manage and prevent Wernicke’s encephalopathy and Wernicke/Korsakoff syndrome through a Chief Medical Officer (CMO) bulletin issued in January 2015. The article highlighted that the key recommendations were to offer oral and, if indicated, parental thiamine at the upper end of the British National Formulary (BNF) range to those at risk of developing Wernicke’s encephalopathy e.g. those harmful or dependent on alcohol and those who may be malnourished, in acute
withdrawal or have decompensated liver disease through a chief medical officer bulletin.

3) Supporting an ARBD Conference in Wales held in March 2015 where expert speakers from Liverpool, Fife and Glasgow shared their experiences of running ARBD services with conference delegates including psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, substance misuse workers and academics.

4) Participating in a new task and finish group established by Brynawel Residential Rehab comprising a range of health and social care specialists, substance misuse commissioners and academics to consider what further actions are required at an all Wales level to respond to ARBD.

Building on this work, the Welsh Government will now establish and lead a national ARBD group to inform the ARBD actions that need to be included in the new three year substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18.

**Recommendation 10**

*That the Welsh Government reviews the treatment pathways available for people suffering from dementia caused by alcohol misuse, with an emphasis on ensuring that they are correctly diagnosed and have access to the full range of services available, and sets out its response to the review in the next Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018).*

**Response: Accept**

We will review how these current treatment pathways are being implemented in Wales and provide additional detail within the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 on responding to these findings where appropriate.

The Welsh Government remains committed to improving services for those affected by dementia and this is demonstrated in *Wales: a Dementia-Friendly Nation* recently launched.

In May 2015 the *Dementia: Reduce Your Risk* guidance was launched. The guide explains, in accessible terms, the simple lifestyle changes that can be made to remain fitter and healthier, and lessen the chances of developing dementia. A communications plan to raise awareness of the six steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of dementia is currently being developed. Step four is to avoid drinking too much alcohol. This will be an action point in the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 which will further reinforce the preventative message about the dangers of alcohol misuse and dementia and also ensure that treatment pathways for those affected are appropriate.
Additional funding is also being made available to support those with dementia, including:

- £240,000 of funding for Dementia Link Nurses this year to help improve diagnosis rates, to assist people in accessing the best care, and live their lives to the best.
- £800,000 being made available at primary care level which will be used to secure 32 new posts, embedded within, and working across primary care clusters, to provide face-to-face support and information to patients and their families/carers for up to 12 months after diagnosis, and beyond that when the disease is further advanced and different challenges emerge.
- £4 million invested in psychiatric liaison services to improve the experience of older people who have physical and mental health problems in general hospitals, which will support hospitals to provide timely mental health assessments and reduce length of stay and readmission rates.

We also continue to support the Wales Dementia Helpline which is a bilingual service, available on a 24/7 basis, 365 days a year, which continues to provide advice and emotional support to those who need advice on a specific concern, or who simply need to talk.

Recommendation 11
That the Welsh Government maps all of the alcohol and substance misuse services in Wales, identifies any gaps and sets out how these gaps will be addressed in the next Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018).

Response: Accept

All Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards (APBs) in Wales are required to undertake a gap analysis as part of the development of their substance misuse commissioning strategies. The Welsh Government will shortly be publishing revised commissioning guidance for APBs which takes into account the further emerging expertise on commissioning; the strengthened role of the APBs, the requirement to establish an outcome based commissioning strategy and new national and local priorities.

In order to develop the new Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018) we have also directly consulted with stakeholders and service users across Wales through a series of workshop style events. This has provided an added opportunity for us to identify any gaps in provision and will assist us to determine priorities for the new delivery plan.

In addition, the Dan 24/7 website provides a comprehensive list of all alcohol and substance misuse services in Wales.

Recommendation 12
That the Deputy Minister for Health addresses the particular needs of homeless people who experience alcohol and substance misuse issues in the next Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018).

Response: Accept

Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards are required to review the needs of homeless people as part of their local needs analysis and commission appropriate services to meet the needs of this vulnerable client group.

There are a range of services specifically targeted at this group such as the Bridge Project in Cardiff which provide services to help address dependency within housing related support services. The ultimate aim of the programme is to resettled service users in independent accommodation having dealt with their substance use issues. Another example is the homeless shelter in Rhyl which provides high intensity support to homeless people with substance misuse issues through the provision of advice and support on substance misuse and onward referral to other substance misuse, training and employment services.

The Welsh Government issued a health and wellbeing framework in January 2014 to provide evidence based guidance to service providers and commissioners on a range of harm reduction and health topics. This guidance comprised seven chapters with one chapter focusing specifically on targeting groups such as those that are homeless. The Welsh Government has made it clear to Area Planning Boards that they should implement the framework recommendations and we are monitoring the actions the APBs have in place though our established performance management arrangements. In addition all APB areas have developed harm reduction groups and are working towards implementing the health and wellbeing framework based upon priorities within localities. These groups are attended and supported by a Welsh Government official.

We acknowledge that further work can be undertaken to support homeless people with substance misuse problems and we will set out the further actions we will be taking to support this vulnerable group as part of the new Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18.

Recommendation 13
That the Deputy Minister for Health reviews the aftercare provided by support services, both devolved and non-devolved, to people with alcohol and substance misuse issues on their release from prison, and works with the UK Government and other bodies where necessary to ensure there is access to appropriate accommodation and treatment.

Response: Accept
The Welsh Government has ensured that there are formal links with prisons through its work with the National Offender Management Service and wider, criminal justice partners (including the Drug Interventions Programme) all of whom are represented on all Area Planning Boards and the National Substance Misuse Partnership Board.

Addressing substance misuse forms part of the National Reducing Reoffending Strategy and is a key work stream. We understand the importance of a seamless provision of care and treatment for offenders on release from prison and will continue to work with the Integrated Offender Management Service and substance misuse service providers to ensure services are available at the point of discharge from custody: provision which is monitored as part of service delivery requirements placed on providers. In addition, post prison release support forms part of regional harm reduction groups priorities where a wide range of stakeholders come together to discuss care and treatment provision and to ensure the formally agreed referral pathways are provided.

Recommendation 14
That the Welsh Government maps the provision of residential detoxification centres in Wales, including women-only facilities, identifies any gaps and sets out how these gaps will be addressed.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is about to publish a client information leaflet which provides a comprehensive overview of the inpatient detoxification and residential rehabilitation services available across Wales, including women only facilities.

It is for local Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards to undertake a robust needs assessment for all tiers of service provision as part of the development of their commissioning strategies and to set out how this need will be met.

The Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 will consider what further actions are needed centrally to support Tier 4 services nationally.

Recommendation 15
That the Deputy Minister for Health and the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty evaluate the outcomes of the Supporting People Programme in terms of its support for people with alcohol and substance misuse issues, establish the impact of the recent budget reductions, and explore alternative and innovative ways of delivering sustainable residential treatment facilities.

Response: Accept
We will review the Supporting People Programme outcomes for people with alcohol and substance misuse issues and use this information to work with Area Planning Boards to explore innovative ways of delivering sustainable residential treatment.

**Recommendation 16.**
That the Welsh Government puts in place the replacement for the Peer Mentoring Scheme as soon as possible, and strengthens interim measures while this is being implemented.

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government’s application for support from the European Social Fund (ESF) for the Out-of-Work Service continues to progress with the replacement initiative expected to start in early 2016, subject to approval by the Welsh European Funding Office. This service will provide peer mentoring and other suitable support for people recovering from substance misuse and/or mental health issues with the main aim of helping participants into employment, or to help them improve their labour market position.

The proposed service builds on the success and lessons from the Substance Misuse Peer Mentoring project 2009-2014 and interim measures have been put in place by Area Planning Boards to bridge the gap between the two schemes. Examples include the appointment of two recovery workers by Gwent Area Planning Board and an interim “Recovery Coaching” service within North Wales. Similar interim services are in operation within Powys and the Cardiff and Vale APB have built peer support into their aftercare service.

**Recommendation 17.**
That the Deputy Minister for Health works with Public Health Wales, local health boards and other stakeholders to explore how the Welsh Government can provide additional leadership, at a strategic level, to raise awareness of the harms associated with alcohol and substance misuse.

**Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government provides strategic leadership through the Substance Misuse National Partnership Board and has put in place a robust governance framework that includes meeting with Area Planning Board Chairs three times a year as part of our strategic engagement with, and performance management of Area Planning Boards. These meetings are supported by operational substance misuse lead officer meetings which also serve as a best practice exchange.

We take a wider strategic public health approach to awareness raising and support a number of substance misuse specific and related awareness raising campaigns targeting issues such as new psychoactive drugs, alcohol, obesity,
cancer and dementia. Examples include funding DAN 24/7, our free bilingual 24/7 substance misuse helpline and website, and Change4life our advertising campaign that provides advice to help families eat well, move more and live longer. Both initiatives utilise social media where appropriate to get key harm reduction messages across. We also support and promote initiatives such as ‘Dry January’ which encourages people to abstain from alcohol and reflect on their alcohol intake and our successful ‘Know the score’ campaign which educates people about the dangers of drug misuse.

The Welsh Government has also worked closely with Public Health Wales to implement the Welsh Emerging Drugs and Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS) service; the National Steroids and Image Enhancing Drugs Educational Toolkit for Young People; the Health and Well Being Compendium; the ‘Have a Word’ alcohol brief intervention campaign and the harm reduction database that captures a range of information on needle and syringe exchange, naloxone and drug related death data.

In addition, we have published a new liver disease delivery plan which explains how we will improve liver disease services for the population of Wales. Working with NHS Wales, we have developed a plan to help prevent liver disease and improve related services. The plan aims to: stop the rise in liver disease and deaths; give patients more support; improve the quality of services; improve specialist knowledge in liver disease throughout the health service and encourage patients to take responsibility for their health and care.

The new substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18 will set out what additional measures the Welsh Government will be taking in conjunction with Public Health Wales, local health boards and other stakeholders to further raise awareness of the harms associated with alcohol and substance misuse.

Recommendation 18.
That the Deputy Minister for Health works with schools and key stakeholders to explore innovative approaches to educate children and young people about the harms of alcohol and substance misuse, in a consistent way across Wales.

Response: Accept
The All Wales Schools Liaison Core Programme (AWSLCP) currently provides consistent substance misuse education to 100% of schools across Wales and a number of other educational establishments including pupil referral units. Lessons are reviewed on an annual basis and innovative approaches are used to deliver the lessons through each key stage of the curriculum.

In some areas, the schools programme is already supplemented by other innovative approaches to substance misuse education and such approaches are welcomed providing they are evidenced based and quality assured to ensure that
they complement the AWSCLP thereby ensuring that consistent messages are delivered.

A review of the AWSLCP is currently underway and will assess the programme’s effectiveness. This will include consideration of blanket versus targeted delivery; whether the programme should be restricted to delivery in schools or have the flexibility to engage with young people in other ways. Outcomes from the review will be fed into the Donaldson review implementation work looking at the Personal Social Education (PSE).

A whole-school approach to substance misuse issues will also be developed as part of work within the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. Over 99% of schools are actively participating in this programme.

**Recommendation 19.**
That as part of the next Substance Misuse Delivery Plan (2016-2018), the Deputy Minister for Health ensures that universities have strategies in place that adequately address alcohol and substance misuse issues.

**Response: Accept**

A Framework for Healthy and Sustainable Further and Higher Education settings has been developed, and will be rolled out by Public Health Wales commencing in the 2015/16 academic year. One of the topic areas for consideration is substance use and misuse, which includes alcohol. The Framework can be viewed at: 
[www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/82249#introduction](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/82249#introduction)

The framework is complemented by the Corporate Health Standard (CHS), the national quality mark for health and well-being in the workplace, which includes the requirement for employers to have an alcohol and substance misuse policy to support their staff. Four universities have achieved the CHS to-date.

Work is also ongoing with the University of South Wales to form links with all Welsh universities to assess drug and alcohol using behaviours amongst students. In addition we will work with universities to ensure policies are in place and that adequate referral protocols have been established where needed.

The substance misuse delivery plan 2016-18 will set out what further actions can be taken over the next 3 years to address substance misuse and alcohol issues in universities.

**Recommendation 20.**
That the Deputy Minister for Health investigates the effectiveness of alcohol unit labelling, and works with stakeholders – including the UK Government – to identify what additional information could be included on alcohol products.
Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will commission its Knowledge and Analytical Services department to review the current evidence around the effectiveness of alcohol unit labelling. The outcome of this review together with an assessment of the legislative basis, will influence our ongoing discussion with the UK Government on this issue.

Recommendation 21.
That the Welsh Government, as part of its discussions with the UK Government on the production of the reserved powers model, ensures that the forthcoming Wales Bill provides the Assembly with an appropriate set of powers to tackle alcohol misuse in a holistic way.

Response: Accept

We have made our position in relation to alcohol licensing to the UK Government very clear and will continue to push for a reserved powers model that provides the Welsh Government with the powers and tools necessary to tackle alcohol related harm in Wales.