

ABERDEEN CITY

ADP

alcohol & drugs partnership

www.aberdeencityadp.org.uk

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

The Aberdeen City Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP) provided an interim statement on New Psychoactive Substances (NPS – often commonly referred to as ‘Legal Highs’) to Aberdeen City Council for its meeting on 14th May 2014. This was provided in lieu of a motion previously raised by Councillor Ross Thomson at the council meeting held on 5th March 2014. The ADP interim statement provided a situation report on NPS and indicated that the issue would be a substantive agenda item at the ADP meeting held on 12th May 2014.

Councillor Ross Thomson was invited to attend the ADP meeting held on 12th May 2014 in order to speak to the NPS agenda item. Grant McIntosh, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Aberdeen City was also an invited guest. Councillors Marie Boulton, Fraser Forsyth and Jim Kiddie, who are all members of the ADP were also in attendance, as was Councillor Gill Samarai (who was there as an observer).

Councillor Ross Thomson explained his reasons for raising the council motion and then covered the points raised in the interim statement previously provided by the ADP. This led to extensive discussion amongst ADP partners with the conclusion being that it was agreed that the ADP Support Team would produce a briefing note on the current national and local NPS situation. The ADP briefing note is enclosed at **Appendix A**.

APPENDIX A

Briefing Note on New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

1. Introduction

The Aberdeen City Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP) monitors the impact and concerns regarding New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), commonly referred to as 'Legal Highs' and the effects they are having on local communities in Aberdeen City.

A visible aspect of NPS continues to be the 'Head-Shops' operating in Aberdeen City who openly advertise and sell various NPS products. These products are sold under the label of 'not for human consumption' (to avoid consumer protection legislation) and are described under various guises, e.g. research chemicals.

2. Legislation

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and Medicines Act 1968 are the primary pieces of legislation which control the sale or supply of drugs. This is not a devolved issue and as such the Scottish Government cannot directly legislate on this matter.

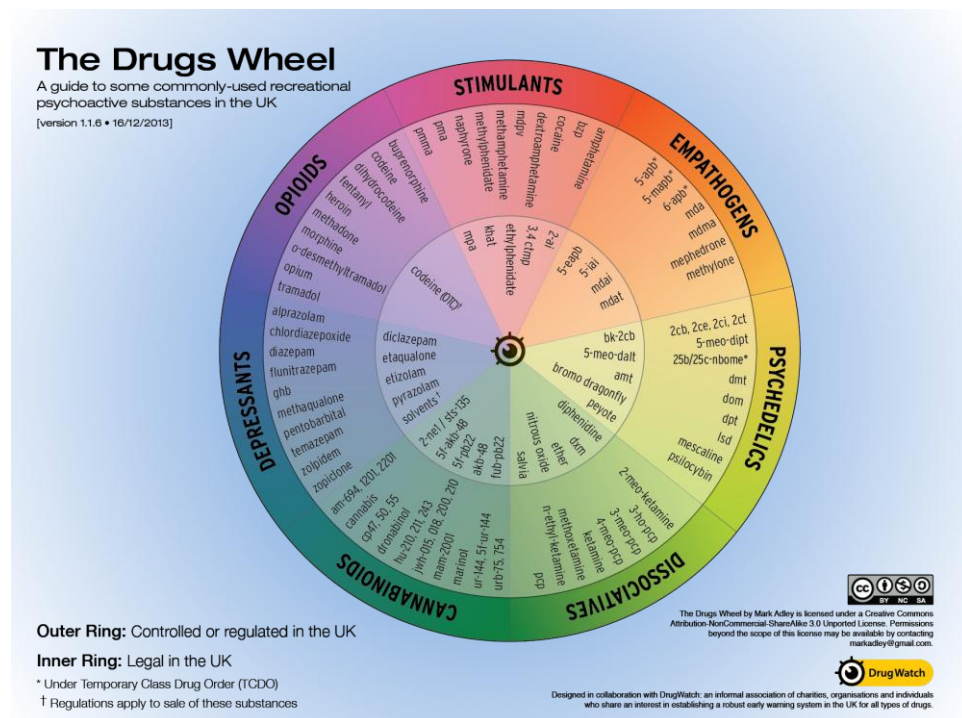
The UK Parliament, through the Home Secretary, can invoke 'temporary banning orders' under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 for new substances as concerns arise through 'early warning systems' across Europe. To date a number of substances have been placed on such orders and all have since been scheduled under the legislation and become illegal to manufacture, supply and possess. Mephedrone (also referred to as 'M-CAT', 'Meow-Meow' and 'Bubbles') is probably the best known example of this. However this does not counter the fact that a range of emerging substances come onto the market efficiently enough to quickly replace those restricted by the legislation.

The UK Parliament in response to concerns regarding the limitations and suitability of current legislation to deal with NPS is currently carrying out a review with a focus on finding the most appropriate solutions to dealing with them more effectively. The Aberdeen City ADP awaits the outcome of this review.

3. NPS

NPS have traditionally been categorised as one of three types: synthetic cannabinoids; stimulant type drugs; hallucinogenic type drugs. However as can be seen by the following 'Drugs Wheel' diagram, the picture is much more complex.

The 'Drugs Wheel' is a tool which has been developed in order to help simplify this by classifying the various substances in terms of their effects, legality and potential harms. The drugs wheel and associated explanatory information can be viewed at www.thedrugswheel.com



4. Scottish situation

NPS issues are of national concern, and reflecting this, the Scottish Government set one of the ADP Ministerial priorities and improvement goals for 2013/14 as being to 'Develop a local understanding of the prevalence and impact of new psychoactive substances in ADP areas based on locally available information and experience'. The Aberdeen City ADP was therefore instrumental in forming the Pan-Grampian NPS monitoring group in 2013, which brings together a range of local partners who are concerned about NPS.

The Aberdeen City ADP has also had dialogue with the Scottish Government on NPS matters over the last two years and has recently contributed to a Scottish Government NPS event (April 2014), feedback from which will be used to inform an official response to the UK Parliament review.

The Scottish Government provides education and information through the 'Know the Score' website - <http://knowthescore.info/> which is available to the general public. This gives details on a range of drugs including NPS.

5. Head shops / on-line retailers

There are estimated to be around 250 'Head Shops' trading in the UK and selling NPS directly to customers. Five of these shops are currently operating in or near the centre of Aberdeen City.

Although it is difficult to ascertain definitively, it would appear that the majority of NPS products are actually purchased through on-line retailers, with these sites sometimes offering discounts for bulk purchases. The internet has also seen a proliferation of vendor and user forum sites dedicated to NPS where knowledge and personal experience on these substances are shared.

6. NPS users

There is sometimes a misconception that it is mainly the younger, inexperienced, experimental drug using population who are purchasing NPS. Intelligence would tend to indicate that whilst these drugs are indeed being accessed by younger people, and that this is often problematic, there is in fact a mixed demographic across a wider age range group, including those with previous drug use experience involved in using NPS.

7. Drug Related Deaths

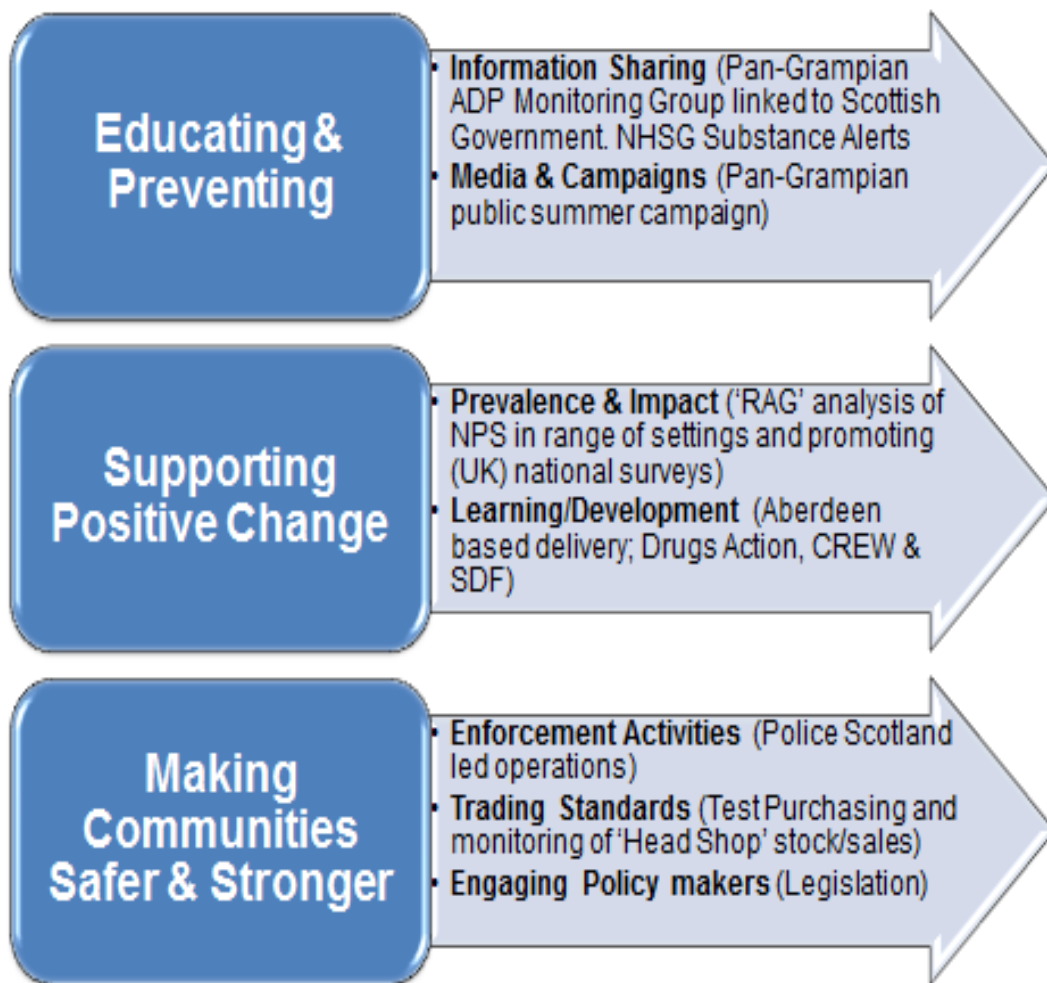
The National Drug Related Deaths Database (Scotland) Report: Analysis of Deaths occurring in 2012 was published in March 2014. It showed that of the 479 cases analysed, there were 36 cases where NPS were present in the body at death. It is important to note however that NPS are generally implicated rather than wholly attributable with regard to the cause of death.

8. Aberdeen City ADP Drug Strategy

The Aberdeen City ADP Drug Strategy: 'Together we will tackle drugs misuse and its effects in Aberdeen City' was published in 2011 and set out strategic aims for all partners to work together on. The document contained three high level strategic outcomes:

- Educating and Preventing
- Supporting Positive Change
- Making Communities Safer and Stronger

Although the growth of NPS pose a particular challenge, the ADP's response continues to align to its strategic priorities, as shown in the following paragraphs.



Information Sharing

- Aberdeen City ADP is a member of the Pan-Grampian NPS Monitoring Group, working with other key partners, including Aberdeenshire and Moray ADPs.
- Aberdeen City ADP links in with the Scottish Drugs Forum and other monitoring groups in existence across the country in order to share up to date information, local experiences as well as learning from good practice across the country.
- The NHS Grampian Substance Alert system is used to cascade information to wider ADP and community contacts as appropriate to provide timely access to information relating to potential risks and harm caused by specific NPS products.

Media & Campaigns

- Aberdeen City ADP is actively working with Aberdeenshire and Morays ADPs in organising a public campaign which will be taken forward during 2014. This will target potential users and raise awareness for those concerned by the availability of NPS.

Prevalence & Impact

- Aberdeen City ADP is engaging with all partners with regard to measuring the prevalence and impact of NPS. This involves developing a 'RAG' (Red, Amber & Green) analysis of the situation as perceived by partner agencies in the City.
- Aberdeen City ADP is supporting and promoting a national (UK) survey regarding NPS which was launched earlier this year, and has been instrumental in ensuring that Scottish local authority data collection is included.

Learning & Development

- The Curriculum for Excellence (Health & Wellbeing – Substance Misuse) Guidance pack was re-published in 2013 to include detailed information regarding NPS for education staff. This will be reviewed in 2014 to reflect developments in knowledge about NPS and opportunities to provide appropriate and effective education.
- In March 2014, the Aberdeen City ADP along with Police Scotland sponsored an event "Not for Human Consumption" run by Transition Extreme aimed at secondary school pupils. This event was very successful and an evaluation confirmed that innovation in terms of engaging young people (and other target groups) regarding NPS issues is vital. The Aberdeen City ADP will ensure the learning from this event is taken forward within other activities.
- A number of learning and workforce development opportunities are available in Aberdeen City. The locally commissioned drug agency, Drugs Action Aberdeen, provides information, advice and support, including provision of educational inputs for local agency staff in respect to their knowledge and understanding of NPS. Nationally commissioned agencies CREW (Edinburgh) and the Scottish Drugs Forum are also engaged to provide a further level of opportunity for stakeholders within the City. A 'cascade' training model developed by CREW has been promoted by the Aberdeen City ADP.

Enforcement Activities / Trading Standards

- Aberdeen City ADP continues to support the work of Police Scotland and ACC Trading Standards officers as they monitor the activity within local 'Head-Shops'.

Engaging Policy Makers

- The Pan-Grampian NPS Monitoring Group meets regularly and ensures that communication and ongoing dialogue with policy makers continues to be a central part of this process.

9. Conclusion

Over the last few years the situation regarding NPS has evolved rapidly and has become increasingly challenging at both national and local levels. To this end, the Aberdeen City ADP will continue to monitor and adapt its response via these delivery outcomes to address emerging trends.

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