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Harm criminalisation of drugs causes to the community

It was acknowledged that the de-criminalisation was outside the remit of the Scrutiny Panel. The prime purpose of the review was to examine the appropriateness of current treatment services and harm reduction provisions.

The Panel agreed to note the following views -

- (a) Criminalisation of drugs incurs an enormous cost to the tax payer - enforcement, prison, after care together with personal and social costs of burglaries, muggings etc.
- (b) Alcohol creates far more damage to individuals and the community but is a legal substance.
- (c) It would be more logical to have a social harm reduction strategy to limit and control the use of drugs similar to the recently approved Alcohol Strategy.
- (d) Illegality of drugs has not been successful in reducing prevalence of drug use.
- (e) Regulation of drug use would promote safe use of drugs, reduce the cost of drugs to the user and consequently lead to a reduction in crime.
- (f) There would still need to be educational measures to advise on the potential effects of drug use.
- (g) Swiss experiment: Heroin available on prescription did not lead to an increase in 'drug-tourists' as heroin is not available without registration. There is no incentive to leak onto the streets as the price is low.
- (h) In the past (19th century) use of heroin was not illegal in the United Kingdom.