

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

10 FEBRUARY 2015

<b>Title:</b>	<b>New Psychoactive Substances</b>
<b>Report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Wards Affected: All</b>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>
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<b>Sponsor:</b> Anne Bristow, Corporate Director Adult and Community Services	
<b>Summary:</b> <p>This report presents information about New Psychoactive Substances, which have become more prominent and widely available in recent years. This report has been presented to the Substance Misuse Board</p> <p>The paper outlines the difficulties for the government to legislate against new substances, which are developed extremely quickly and are often sold before research can be undertaken into any potential risks they present.</p> <p>This paper outlines what is known about the current market for New Psychoactive Substances in the Borough and how aware residents are of the substances and their dangers. It also reports recommendations which have been agreed by the Community Safety Partnership Board.</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b> <p>The Health and Wellbeing Board is invited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comment on the work to date and suggest any future action</li><li>• Discuss or make comment on what GPs, pharmacies and other health partners can do in response to this problem.</li></ul>	
<b>Reason(s)</b> <p>The information in this report builds on the objectives contained in Encouraging Civic Pride and Enabling Social Responsibility priorities, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote a welcoming, safe, and resilient community; and</li><li>• Protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults and children healthy and safe.</li></ul>	

## 1. Introduction and Background

1.1 New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), also known as legal highs, are intoxicating substances that are not prohibited by UK law or have only recently been made illegal. The prevalence of NPS in the UK is rising in line with advances in technology and increased availability.

- 1.2 At present, there is limited information about the use of NPS locally. The Substance Misuse Strategy team are investigating availability, sources and general use of NPS in the Borough in order to develop a target delivery plan address the issue.
- 1.3 The following report outlines the risks associated with NPS, work conducted to-date to understand the issue locally and presents a set of recommendations which have been agreed by the Community Safety Partnership.
- 1.4 The Health and Wellbeing Board should note that separate work is underway to look at the abuse of prescriptive and over the counter medicines and this will be presented to Health and Wellbeing Board in due course.

## **2. Proposal and Issues**

- 2.1 This is an information report to outline recommendations which have been agreed by the Community Safety Partnership in response to the issue of NPS. As a result there are no proposals contained in this report.
- 2.2 The following recommendations were agreed by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Board on 9 March 2014 following consultation with the Borough's Substance Misuse Strategy Board, a sub-group of the CSP:
- Recommendation 1 - Work with licensing to identify vendors of NPS in the Borough and to conduct spot purchasing – this will give a better picture of the types of NPS being sold in the Borough;
  - Recommendation 2 - Work with hospital admissions in the Borough to identify toxic symptoms and drug induced psychosis and ensure appropriate referrals are made to services;
  - Recommendation 3 - Extend research into NPS with young people to gain more accurate and comprehensive results;
  - Recommendation 4 - Commission NPS training for substance misuse and PSHE leads in schools. It would be beneficial to have at least one individual fully trained in NPS in each service and school;
  - Recommendation 5 - Create a leaflet on the dangers of nitrous oxide and disseminate in the Borough, in particular to parents and schools;
  - Recommendation 6 - Deliver an education programme in all secondary schools in the Borough teaching young people about the risks of NPS and harm minimisation.
- 2.3 Work has taken place on these recommendations following their agreement by the CSP Board.

## **3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 NPS have existed for a long time, mostly created as legal compounds to replace substances that become prohibited. In recent years, with developing technologies,

NPS have become more prominent and available. Where there has been a decline in the use of illegal drugs nationally, the use of 'legal highs' has increased rapidly. It is estimated that 150 NPS were created in the last three years, this equates to a new compound being created every week.

- 3.2 The issue of NPS is particularly significant in the UK. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the UK has the largest market for legal highs in the European Union.
- 3.3 NPS can be broken down into four categories; stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens and synthetic cannabinoids. Common examples of NPS include 'spice' a synthetic cannabinoid and Alpha Methyl-tryptamine (AMT) a compound mimicking ecstasy.
- 3.4 Currently, NPS are readily available online and in 'Head Shops', which can be found on most UK high streets. Legislating against these sellers is a challenge, as enforcers must prove that the vendor is selling the product for human consumption. Further to this, many of the online sites used to sell NPS fall outside of UK jurisdiction making it almost impossible to legislate against them.
- 3.5 At present, UK law allows a 12 month temporary banning order to be placed on any new psychoactive compound that may have a detrimental impact on humans, while further investigations are made into its properties and potential illegalisation. Further to this, the government has launched a review into NPS, which was published in September 2014. The report highlighted recommendations regarding continued research, improved data collection, data sharing and ensuring that the workforce is skilled and competent.

### **Risks Associated with NPS**

- 3.6 Like all psychoactive substances, NPS can have a significant detrimental impact on the user's mental and physical health.
- 3.7 As the majority of NPS are initially legal they are readily accessible and often cheaper than illegal substances, making them an attractive alternative for drug users.
- 3.8 The term 'legal highs' is often used to describe NPS. This is problematic, as it reinforces the legality of drugs (many of which are in fact illegal). In addition, individuals may associate less harm with substances that are legal and be more inclined to use them,
- 3.9 Due to changes in legislation, it is now illegal to suggest that substances may be used for human consumption at point of sale. Where previously substances have included safety information and dosage guidance, packaging now simply states 'not for human consumption'. This has led to individuals being uninformed about what they are consuming and, in some circumstances, over-dosing.
- 3.10 Further to this, as NPS mimic other illegal drugs, individuals may be inclined to consume them in the same way, however NPS can often be more potent than the drugs they mimic and have increased side effects. For example, there are over 300 synthetic cannabinoids, which have been seen to induce psychosis.

- 3.11 It is estimated that one new psychoactive compound is created every week, this heightens risks, as newer substances have had less testing and thus both their short and long-term effects on humans are unknown.

### **NPS Locally**

- 3.12 There have been no reports locally of individuals accessing services as a result of NPS. However, this does not mean that they are not being used in the Borough, as individuals using them may be less likely to present to services as those using more addictive substances such as opiates and crack. Furthermore, service users may not be aware that they are taking NPS.
- 3.13 The Substance Misuse Strategy team have piloted a survey with young people in order to understand the use of NPS in the Borough. There were a total of 13 responses to the pilot, which is a very small sample, but indicated that:
- more than 50% had heard of NPS;
  - more than 30% knew someone who had used NPS;
  - 23% had used NPS themselves;
  - NPS can be purchased in shops in Romford, Stratford and central London and online; and
  - Nitrous Oxide (also known as 'laughing gas') and a synthetic cannabinoids ('spices' and 'herbal cannabis') is consumed by young people in the Borough.
- 3.14 There was an inconsistency in respondents' knowledge of NPS, suggesting that the majority of respondents surveyed were poorly informed about the topic.
- 3.15 Work is now underway to extend this survey to a much wider audience in order to gain a more accurate insight into NPS use among young people locally.
- 3.16 To date, there has been one shop identified in Dagenham that sells hydroponic paraphernalia associated with the production of cannabis. It is unknown whether this shop also sells legal highs. Work needs to be done to investigate if there are any NPS vendors in the Borough.
- 3.17 Information from Subwize, young people's drug and alcohol service, suggests that young people may be consuming NPS in their homes and in parks.
- 3.18 A representative from CRI delivered training on NPS to members of the Substance Misuse Team, a representative from Subwize and a Senior Manager for the Borough's Education Inclusion, School Improvement Service. This was very useful and it would be beneficial to roll this out to further team members and school staff.

### **What can be done?**

- 3.19 Scoping can be conducted to understand the availability and use of NPS locally. Having a better insight into the prevalence of NPS in Barking and Dagenham will enable appropriate strategy and resources to be developed to address the issue. This should involve doing further surveys with young people, but also doing some research with the 'transitional' age group in the Borough (those aged 18-24), as this group have been identified as at risk of using NPS in other Boroughs.

- 3.20 To further build the local NPS picture, work can be done to scope potential NPS vendors in and to use legislation where possible to reduce the selling of NPS to residents.
- 3.21 Education can be used to build factual awareness for young people about the risks associated with using NPS, as well as harm reduction advice for those using NPS. CRI, for example, offer training and awareness building workshops in other Boroughs, which have been reported as an effective way of spreading the important information concerning NPS.
- 3.22 Training can be delivered to substance misuse and school staff to ensure they are up-to-date on information around NPS and can disseminate this to young people and service users. Ensuring that schools are informed is essential to ensure that they can identify signs that a young person may be consuming legal highs and make appropriate referrals. It would be beneficial to have an NPS lead in every secondary school in the Borough.
- 3.23 Work can also be done with hospitals to identify admissions who present toxic symptoms and drug induced psychosis and to ensure that they are referring these individuals to the appropriate services.

## **4 Consultation**

The contents of this report and the recommendations agreed by the CSP Board were subject to consultation with the Substance Misuse Strategy Board. This Board is attended by Health and Wellbeing Board partners, including the Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS England, the Metropolitan Police and LBBD Council.

## **5 Mandatory Implications**

### **5.1 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**

The report complements the identification of need and the priorities for future action described in the JSNA, specifically section 7.12 Substance Misuse.

### **5.2 Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

The report supports and furthers priorities from the Health and Wellbeing Strategy by proposing work which will cause fewer adolescents and adults to problematically use substances.

### **5.3 Integration**

The report outlines a need for further analysis in to the local context and therefore it is too early to define implications on the area of integration.

### **5.4 Financial Implications**

There are no additional financial implications directly arising from this report.

(Implications completed by: Roger Hampson Group Manager Finance (Adults and Community Services))

## **5.5 Legal Implications**

The Legal team have advised that there are no legal implications in this paper

(Implications completed by: Dawn Pelle, Adult Care Lawyer)

## **5.6 Risk Management**

The report outlines a need for further analysis in to the local context and therefore it is too early to define implications on the area of risk management.

## **5.7 Patient / Service User Impact**

The report outlines a need for further analysis in to the local context and therefore it is too early to define implications on the area of patient / service user impact.

## **6 Non-mandatory Implications**

### **6.1 Crime and Disorder**

There is a potential for NPS usage to fuel anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces in the Borough. This is included within the recommendations.

### **6.2 Safeguarding**

Substance misuse of any kind has an impact on safeguarding and the Substance Misuse Strategy Board will include all relevant safeguarding tools in to local strategies.

### **Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

None

### **List of Appendices:**

None