

**REPORT TO:** Safer Policy & Performance Board  
**DATE:** 16 June 2015  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Communities  
**PORTFOLIO:** Health and Wellbeing  
**SUBJECT:** Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS)  
**WARD(S):** Borough Wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to implement a total ban of any substance termed Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) also known as 'Legal Highs' across all Halton Borough Council services and venues.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

- (i) Note the contents of the report.**
- (ii) To present a report to the Executive Board recommending that the use of any substance known as Novel Psychoactive Substances be banned across all Halton Borough Council services and venues.**

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 NOVEL PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)**

3.2 Overall drug use has reduced in the UK. However, a significant recent development has been an increase in the range of new and easily available novel psychoactive substances (NPS), also known as "legal highs". These chemical substances are newly created, and hence, are not automatically controlled under legislation.

3.3 These drugs have been designed to evade drug laws, are widely available and have the potential to pose serious risks to public health and safety and can even be fatal. The emergence of NPS and the pace at which they have developed is a concern to policymakers, law enforcement personnel and healthcare professionals locally, nationally and across Europe and beyond.

3.4 In the UK NPS can be purchased on the internet, via dealers on the streets and in clubs and pubs, and in shops. Test purchasing has found that NPS can contain legal substances, illegal substances, or a mixture of both.

3.5 Evidence of potential harms is emerging, with indications that the health implications of NPS can be just as serious as illicit drugs and can cause a range of physical and psychological symptoms.

- 3.6 The number of NPS available is constantly changing and growing. A record number of 81 substances were identified for the first time in Europe in 2013 - an increase on previous years. This means the number of identified NPS now exceeds the total number of psychoactive substances currently controlled by the international drug conventions. Whilst there has been a general increase in the number of novel NPS detected, it is important to note that the vast majority are permutations of groups of similar substances and many have not yet been identified in the UK.

#### **4.0 AVAILABILITY OF NOVEL PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE**

- 4.1 The marketing and sale of NPS is often designed specifically to avoid legislation under the Medicines Act 1968. They are often sold in brightly coloured packaging under a variety of brand names with “not for human consumption” clearly stated. They may variously be described as “plant food”, “fish food”, “room odouriser” or other terms with labelling commonly stating that they are “research chemicals”. Generally safety data is not provided.
- 4.2 In the UK, our most robust estimates of use in the general population come from our national crime surveys. This survey suggests that NPS use among the general population tends to be low compared to the use of other illicit drugs. Cannabis is still the most commonly used illicit drug in England and Wales, taken by 6.6% of adults in the last year. However, surveys suggest use among younger age groups and some sub-sections of the population e.g. regular clubbers may be higher (53%).
- 4.3 There is a common, but mistaken perception that because such drugs are not legally controlled or banned they are safe. However, there is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the potential harms (both physical and social) associated with NPS.
- 4.4 Most legally available NPS are sold with no data regarding their chemistry, pharmacology or toxicology, no safety assessments and no administration instructions. The paucity of information on the pharmacology and toxicology of most NPS makes it hard to understand their possible dangers, or even to know what substances are contained in products branded.

#### **5.0 DEATHS**

- 5.1 Nationally the number of deaths involving NPS is low compared with the number of deaths from heroin/morphine, methadone and cocaine poisoning. However, over the past few years there has been an increasing trend in the number of deaths linked to NPS use. Such deaths across the UK increased from 29 in 2011 to 52 in 2012, to 60 in 2013.

#### **6.0 NATIONAL RESPONSE**

- 6.1 The UK Government recognised the emerging threat and challenges of Novel Psychoactive Substances. National programmes have included early warning systems, banning of over 500 new drugs, and advice to local authorities with a

clear prevention agenda to improve health outcomes.

6.2 The Government continues to clamp down on the trade in legal highs, with the development of a general ban on supply across the UK, this policy would provide an opportunity to remove Novel Psychoactive Substances from high street stores and other trading establishments or venues and increase the powers for law enforcement agencies to tackle the trading of Novel Psychoactive Substances.

6.3 In February 2015 Lincolnshire City Council used the Public Space Protection Order to ban individuals taking (using) intoxicating substances (alcohol and NPS) within the city centre region. Other Local Authorities have used existing powers to enforce closure of head shops or the use of legal highs.

## 7.0 **LOCAL RESPONSE**

7.1 Legal highs are an emerging issue for Halton. There has been an increase in the use of small canisters of national Novel Psychoactive Substances within the Halton Stadium, local parks and other public areas.

7.2 Council and Police Officers have provided basic information to raise awareness about the harm and risks associated with Legal Highs within the Borough with focus on local businesses (shops, pubs and clubs).

7.3 The Halton Substance Misuse Provider CRI (Crime Reduction Initiatives) CRI conducted workshop on the dangers of Legal Highs lead by CRI's national Novel Psychoactive Substances lead. The workshop was attended by CRI Staff, YMCA, Cheshire Police and Young Addaction and was successful in educating and refreshing knowledge on this subject matter A number of external stake holder services including local hostels and young person's substance misuse services were invited to attend sessions.

## 8.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL RESPONSE TO NPS**

8.1 The Executive Board recommend with immediate effect the use of Novel Psychoactive Substances is banned across all Halton Borough Council services and venues.

## 9.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified

## 10.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None identified

## 11.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

11.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The Novel/New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) impacts on children, young people and their families and partners are working to provide education and advice to schools and other services.

**11.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

**11.3 A Healthy Halton**

The prevalence and impact of NPS on the health of Halton residents will continue to be monitored. Reducing the harm caused by substance misuse will continue to be a priority for all partners and will form a component of children and young people and adult services, as well as wider education and awareness activities.

**11.4 A Safer Halton**

Novel/New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) may have an impact on levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in Halton. As well as providing appropriate legal enforcement, partners are working to provide education and advice to reduce the impact of harm and anti-social behaviour.

**11.5 Environment and Regeneration**

None identified

**12.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

12.1 Novel Psychoactive Substances presents a risk to a person's health and wellbeing, the national death rate due to NPS continues to increase year on year. The long term impact continues to be investigated by national agencies.

**13.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

13.1 There are no Equality and Diversity issues associated with this report

**13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

13.1 None under the meaning of the Act.