

REPORT TO: Safer Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 13 September 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Community & Environment

PORTFOLIO: Community Safety

SUBJECT: Cannabis Grow Awareness Scheme

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the policy and performance board on the Cheshire Constabulary pilot scheme to raise awareness around cannabis growing within the private rented housing sector (Police Operation 'Instinct').

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) **the report and presentation be noted; and**
- 2) **The Partnership consider the information presented and raise any questions of interest or points of clarification following the presentation.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The “underground,” cannabis market in the UK is worth an estimated £3 Billion*, with 29.4% of 16 – 59 year olds in England and Wales believed to have now used the drug during their lifetime. (**Statista Survey 2022*).

3.2 Organised Crime Groups (OCG's) are using increasingly sophisticated methods to ensure yields are maximised and detection opportunities are limited; increasing profits along the way. There has also been an increase in cannabis produced on a personal level, as opposed to cultivated in more commercial circumstances.

3.3 This kind of growing activity can cause thousands of pounds worth of damage to the properties in which it is carried out and can pose a serious risk to the public due to the bypassing of the electrical supply. As a result police officers will be speaking to landlords and letting agents across Halton, in order to make them aware of the signs that would indicate that a cannabis factory might be being operated in one of their properties and what to do if they suspect that there is one.

3.4 This pilot scheme aims to raise awareness among a group of people who are best placed to help with this issue of drugs factories and it will increase awareness

thereby leading to more detections. It is also important that landlords understand that if they know that a tenant is growing cannabis on their property, and they fail to inform the police, technically they are guilty of an offence. The punishment depends on how much cannabis is involved but can range from 12 months to five years in jail and/or a fine.

Spotting the signs of potential cannabis growing:

- Strong, sickly smells different to the smell of cannabis being smoked
- Excessive security
- High levels of condensation
- Lots of visitors - often at unsociable hours
- Lack of snow frost/snow on roofs in times of cold weather
- Bright lights on in the house during the day and night
- Constant buzz of a ventilation system
- Cannabis growing equipment, for example lighting and ventilation equipment.
- Windows constantly covered
- Windows blacked out either using black plastic or heavy fabric
- High levels of heat and condensation in a unit, resulting in peeling paint or mildewed carpet. Heavy condensation at the windows may also be seen
- Lots of cables, or electrical wiring being tampered with and bypassed circuitry
- A sudden jump/fall in electricity bills
- Bin bags full of vegetable material being thrown away. The stalks and roots of cannabis plants are discarded when the plants are harvested.

3.5 Attached as appendix A is the presentation outlining the Pilot scheme and the local problem across the Cheshire Constabulary Northern division (Halton/Warrington).

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The policy implications of the review relate primarily to the Safer Halton priority. However this is a cross cutting work area which has wider implications on other areas of council business.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The Community Safety Service as a universal service impacts on the health, safety and well-being of young people.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no direct implications for this priority.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The Community Safety Service as a universal service impacts on the Health, safety and well-being of the residents of Halton.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

6.5 The Community Safety Service as a universal service impacts on the Health, safety and well-being of the residents of Halton.

6.6 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

There are no direct implications for this priority.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 **None at present**

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

9.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.