

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 23 April 2025
13th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

People's Panel - note by the clerk

What is a people's panel?

1. A People's Panel is a form of public engagement, which brings together a randomly selected and broadly representative sample of the population to learn about an issue, discuss it, and make recommendations.
2. People's Panels empower citizens to actively contribute and deliberate on key issues, enhancing Parliament's scrutiny with innovative, informed citizen input and strengthening the Parliament's reputation for delivering inclusive democratic participation.

People's panel on drug deaths and drugs harm

3. The Scottish Parliament held a People's Panel on tackling drug deaths and drugs harm over two weekends (25-27 October and 15-17 November 2024) and an additional two online sessions on 6 and 12 November 2024. A summary of the process and outcomes is outlined below, with further detail to be found in the [People's Panel report](#) published on 20 January 2025.
4. The Panel consisted of 23 randomly selected members from across Scotland. Panel Members were aged between 16 and 74 years old and broadly reflected Scotland's demographics in terms of gender, age, region, ethnicity, disability, educational level, and attitudes towards drug harm.
5. The Panel considered the following question:

What does Scotland need to do differently to reduce drug related harms?

6. In order to answer this question, the panel heard evidence on the background to drug deaths and drugs harm, looked at what the Scottish Government is currently doing and learned about a range of measures and approaches from across the drug treatment and recovery sectors.
7. The deliberative aspect of the sessions involved panel members working in small groups to consider the evidence they had heard using the following questions:
 - What is working well?
 - What is not working?
 - What could be done differently to improve things?
8. After the panel members had heard evidence on the background and context to drug deaths and drugs harm in Scotland, they then heard overviews of, and held discussions on, the following seven themes:
 - Participation, rights and lived experience
 - Justice and drug law reform

- Access to treatment and care and support
 - Prevention
 - Tackling stigma
 - Harm reduction programmes
 - Workforce
9. From these seven themes the panel members chose four which they wished to explore further, and hear more evidence on, during the second weekend. The first four themes in the list above were those chosen by the panel to consider in greater detail. The Panel engaged with a range of expert witnesses, including those with lived experience of drug deaths and drugs harm, across these four themes.
10. An [overview of slides](#) presented to the People's Panel across both weekends is available on the Scottish Parliament website.
11. While all but one of the recommendations relate to the four chosen themes, the Panel were not restricted to only providing recommendations on these areas and one relates to harm reduction.

Recommendations from the People's Panel

12. The People's Panel report contained a collective statement and 19 recommendations across five different themes (see **Annex A**). The recommendations are set out in detail along with the statement in the report.
13. The Scottish Government fully accepted 13 of the recommendations, accepted five in principle, and noted that one related to the work of the Cross Committee rather than the Scottish Government.
14. Many of these recommendations related to the work of other committees. However, one recommendation related specifically to the work of the Criminal Justice Committee.
15. This suggested that there should be an inquiry by a committee in the Parliament on the reported increase of supply of illegal drugs in the prison sector.

Action/Recommendations

- 16. The Committee is invited to thank all the participants who took part in the People's Panel and to discuss their report at today's meeting.**
- 17. The Committee is invited to note that the recommendation for an inquiry into drug use in prisons is now being taken forward and invite the Parliament's PACT team to let the participants know that this is being implemented.**
- 18. Members are invited to discuss what, if any, further action is needed.**

**Clerks to the Committee
April 2025**

Annex A

Recommendations from the People's Panel

NB. Response of the Scottish Government in brackets

Participation, rights and lived experience

Recommendation 1 (Accepts in principle)

The Human Rights Bill needs to be passed by Parliament before the Parliamentary session ends and should incorporate the *Charter of Rights for People Affected by Substance Use* (published December 11, 2024).

Recommendation 2 (Accepts)

More people with lived experience should provide ongoing support and aftercare in the statutory workforce.

Recommendation 3 (Accepts)

There needs to be appropriate anti-stigma training for staff across all public bodies, and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships led by and delivered by those with lived/living experience. National training guidelines should be improved and rolled out over multi-sectors and covering all sections of recovery.

Recommendation 4 (Accepts)

The pay and fair working conditions of people with lived experience needs to be equitable with that of equivalent public sector workers in the drug and alcohol field. There needs to be consistent financial support and training for the workforce, especially for support workers and people with lived and living experiences.

Justice and law reform

Recommendation 5 (Accepts in principle)

All services should be able to refer to each other eg police, courts, third sector and NHS. Funding needs to be diverted to support this.

Recommendation 6 (Accepts)

There needs to be continuation and consistency of de-penalising minor drug offences and not imprisoning people for short periods. This would involve maximum use of drugs courts and/or drug testing and treatment orders with a streamlined assessment and referral process for services.

Recommendation 7 (for the Cross Committee)

The Cross Committee should consider further action to look at the increase of drug supply in the prison sector.

Access to treatment and care and support

Recommendation 8 (Accepts)

There needs to be a well-publicised single point of access for specialised advice & support relating to alcohol and drug problems (like NHS 111, Childline or Samaritans), or an alternative provided by a non-government body e.g. Third Sector.

Recommendation 9 (Accepts in principle)

There needs to be Scottish Government action to ensure all public and third sector services are enabled and supported to share information including the justice system. All bodies must have an information sharing agreement in place which is GDPR compliant and includes service user consent, and all staff must be made familiar with this.

Recommendation 10 (Accepts in principle)

There needs to be a guaranteed and protected five year minimum period of funding for community and third sector services, including assessment and evaluation.

Recommendation 11 (Accepts)

The MAT standards should be extended to cover all drugs causing harm.

Prevention

Recommendation 12 (Accepts)

Drug education should be included in the mainstream curriculum (curriculum for excellence) from P5 – P7 and onwards. It should be based on the European Prevention Curriculum – or similar approach.

Recommendation 13 (Accepts)

In order to ensure drug harm education is properly implemented in the curriculum there needs to be engagement with parents, guardians, carers and the teaching profession regarding age-appropriate content and application.

Recommendation 14 (Accepts)

There needs to be financial support and provision for external organisations such as CREW & Clued Up to support education in schools and outreach in communities to encourage peer learning on drug harm issues. These kinds of services need to be accessible at a national level.

Recommendation 15 (Accepts)

Where evidence proves positive outcomes, relevant services should move from a zero-tolerance approach to a high tolerance approach, where appropriate for each individual.

Recommendation 16 (Accepts)

There needs to be an equitable expansion of employability support for people in recovery including mainstream courses and apprenticeships that includes more sectors. There must be safeguards put in place to ensure equitable pay and conditions and stop the risk of exploitation.

Recommendation 17 (Accepts)

There needs to be continued support for people in recovery, such as supported temporary accommodation and key workers, following referral to services.

Recommendation 18 (Accepts)

There needs to be urgent examination of the issues around poverty - including but not limited to homelessness and those suffering financial deprivation as a result of life changing events - with input from all relevant agencies including third sector and input from a people's panel.

Harm reduction, tackling stigma and workforce

Recommendation 19 (Accepts in principle)

There needs to be an additional public awareness campaign on the distribution and use of naloxone.

Scottish Government response to the People's Panel report

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care provided a formal response to the People's Panel report to the Convenors of this Cross Committee. A summary of the key points from this response are set out below:

- The Scottish Government fully accepted 13 of the recommendations, accepted five in principle and noted that one referred to the work of the Cross Committee rather than the Scottish Government.
- The majority of the recommendations are already being undertaken within the National Mission and cross-government programmes of work. Those that are not already being progressed will be incorporated into considerations for the Scottish Government's post-National Mission planning.
- The Human Rights Bill will be introduced in the next parliamentary session, subject to the outcome of the 2026 election. The Charter of Rights was published on 11 December 2024, with many of these rights already in law.
- The Scottish Government will launch and support the following:
 - a 'Guiding Principles' document setting out how employers can best support employees with lived and living experience of substance use

- two 'Employability Support Toolkits' to support those with lived and living experience to pursue careers in the substance use sector
 - a Drugs and Alcohol Workforce Knowledge and Skills Framework for those supporting people to address their substance use challenges.
- Scottish Government officials have carried out initial engagement with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service around the feasibility of a further expansion of drug courts.
- The Scottish Government intend to legislate for improved information sharing through Part 2 of the National Care Service Bill (Section 36). Stage 2 of the Bill is expected to be completed by 28 March 2025.
- The Scottish Government's Fairer Funding pilot aims to provide organisations of eligible funded activity with advanced notice of their grants. They also have a commitment to provide 2-year funding to eligible grantees. Details of the organisations whose grants are included in the 2-year funding pilot can be accessed at Annex A to this [letter](#).
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland have been commissioned by the Scottish Government to establish regional improvement hubs to design and improve pathways into, through and from rehabilitation. They are preparing Self-Assessment Thematic Analysis reports for 29 Alcohol and Drug Partnerships which will highlight key areas for improvement.
- The Scottish Government is developing a Population Health Framework, to be published in Spring this year, which will consider what more can be done to mitigate against the social and economic drivers of ill health.