



Home Office

Rt Hon Lynne Featherstone MP
Minister for Crime Prevention

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David Rees AM
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Welsh Assembly
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff, CF99 1NA

27 March 2015

Dear David

Thank you for providing a copy of your Committee's report into new psychoactive substances. I welcome the work the Committee and I support each of the report's fourteen recommendations. The Home Office and other Whitehall departments have a role to assist the Welsh Government deliver those commitments. While I can only speak for the Home Office, we stand ready to contribute as required.

The findings of your report are consistent with two other recent Expert Panel reports into NPS: the Panel appointed by the Home Office who reported last year and the recently published Scottish Government's Expert Panel. We now have a growing body of evidence to work from.

In relation to your three clear themes, we agree that the term "legal high" is unhelpful and we actively avoid using this phrase, using "new psychoactive substances" (NPS) across Government instead. Secondly, we accept that cooperation and coordination between national and devolved governments is crucial to tackle NPS and believe that good links are already in place which we can build upon. Thirdly, we also recognise that legislation alone will not fully address the problem of NPS which is why we are delivering a multi-faceted response incorporating prevention and education, treatment and information sharing under the three strands of our Drug Strategy: to reduce demand, restrict supply and build recovery.

A range of activity is underway to tackle NPS. On legislation, we have already banned more than 500 new drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and we have led international action with new UN resolutions against NPS, including successfully securing a vote to control mephedrone internationally which was passed on 13 March.

On enforcement, we have created the Forensic Early Warning System to identify NPS in the UK which in turn supports law enforcement action and updated guidance to local authorities on taking action against “head shops” selling NPS using existing legislation.

In relation to health, prevention and treatment, we have created awareness campaigns such as ‘Rise Above’, a new online resilience building resource aimed at 11-16 year-olds providing resources to help develop skills to make positive choices for their health, including avoiding drug use. We have developed evidence-based online tools for educators and commissioners including the Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information Service (ADEPIS) which provides practical advice and tools based on the best international evidence. We have launched a NPS resource pack for informal educators and frontline practitioners to use to prevent drug taking amongst young people and with Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust and Project NEPTUNE (Novel Psychoactive Treatment UK Network) we have developed evidence-based clinical guidelines covering assessment and treatment needs of NPS users, as well as information on clinical management of harms resulting from acute and chronic use of ‘club drugs’ and NPS including intoxication, withdrawal and dependence.

The Government fully supports your recommendation to create a general NPS ban across the UK similar to that introduced in Ireland. The Home Office is already developing this proposal with a view to introducing legislation at the earliest opportunity. Officials are in discussion with counterparts in the Welsh Government on this and will be sharing proposals shortly.

Thank you for your report and I look forward to our organisations working closely together to further tackle NPS in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Featherstone', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Lynne Featherstone MP
Minister of State