



Subject:	Notice of Motion – Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals: Update Report
Date:	Friday 19 th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services.
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet and Open Spaces and Streetscene Services

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual.2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained.6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction.7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work so far relating to the Notice of Motion relating to Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals.</p> <p>The motion was proposed by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Smyth at the Standards and Business Committee meeting held on the 24th March 2026 and subsequently referred to the People and Communities Committee for consideration. The motion was presented to the People and Communities Committee on 14 April 2026 and requested an internal report on the role of Belfast City Council in supporting and facilitating harm reduction services, including legal and regulatory considerations.</p>
1.2	<p>Since consideration of the motion, officers have engaged with the relevant statutory partners including representatives from the Department of Health (DoH), the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and event stakeholders involved in planning for the 2026 festival and events season.</p>
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Note the contents of this report and the feedback received from statutory partners regarding the legal, regulatory and operational considerations associated with drug and pill testing facilities at events and festivals; ii. Note the ongoing work being undertaken by the Department of Health, Public Health Agency and PSNI in relation to harm reduction, public health messaging and event planning; and iii. Agree that officers continue to engage with relevant statutory agencies and monitor developments elsewhere within the UK and Ireland. Should there be any future policy developments, pilot programmes or legislative changes which may impact on Belfast City Council's role in this area a report will be brought back into committee.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>Members will recall that the Notice of Motion requested Council support for the introduction of pilot drug and pill testing facilities at major events and festivals and sought consideration of the role Belfast City Council could play in supporting such harm reduction initiatives. Officers have subsequently sought advice from relevant statutory partners to better understand the legal framework, operational requirements and policy considerations associated with such testing services.</p>
3.2	<p>Legal and Regulatory Considerations</p> <p>The Department of Health has advised that drug and pill testing services involve significant legal and regulatory considerations under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Any organisation undertaking testing of controlled substances would require the appropriate licences and approvals to possess, transport, analyse and dispose of controlled drugs.</p>
3.3	<p>In Great Britain, such licences are issued by the Home Office. In Northern Ireland, responsibility would fall to the Department of Health's Medicines Regulatory Group.</p>
3.4	<p>The Department has advised that no formal application for such a licence has been received to date in Northern Ireland. Should a provider seek to establish an on-site testing facility, a range of issues would require consideration, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site security arrangements;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing methodologies and governance arrangements; • Safety and welfare considerations for staff and service users; • Storage, handling and transportation of substances; • Disposal and destruction procedures; • Compliance with licensing requirements and controlled drug legislation.
3.5	<p>The Department has advised that any proposal would represent a novel application and would require detailed assessment and engagement before any licensing arrangements could be considered.</p>
3.6	<p>Policy and Funding Considerations The Department of Health has advised that there is currently no central government funding programme available to support drug testing facilities at festivals and events.</p>
3.7	<p>Whilst examples of on-site testing facilities exist elsewhere in the United Kingdom, these are generally associated with large-scale or multi-day festivals and operate within differing legal and policy frameworks. The Department has further advised that the current Northern Ireland Substance Use Strategy, Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery, does not contain actions relating to the introduction of festival-based drug testing services. Any future policy proposal to introduce such services would presumably require consideration at Executive level.</p>
3.9	<p>Existing and Enhanced Harm Reduction and Public Health Measures The Committee should note that the Council, Department of Health, Public Health Agency and PSNI are already working collaboratively in preparation for the forthcoming festival season. A significant change will be to include specific drug and alcohol mitigation clauses in the site license between Council and the event promoters. Such clauses will give Council and its supporting partners an opportunity to have early sight of mitigation and medical plans. The PSNI and the PHA have already agreed to appraise such plans in partnership with Council when they are received and provide recommendations as required. Other measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visibility of drug amnesty bins throughout concert venues; • Increased public health messaging and awareness campaigns; • Information sharing between relevant agencies; • Cross-border engagement with counterparts in Ireland to support aligned messaging and harm reduction approaches; • Ongoing monitoring of emerging substances and trends.
3.10	<p>The Department of Health has also advised that where concerns arise regarding specific substances, testing can currently be undertaken through existing arrangements involving the PSNI and Forensic Services Northern Ireland, with indicative turnaround times of approximately 48 hours. Increased visibility of the drug amnesty bins will provide better opportunity to support this.</p>
3.11	<p>Belfast City Council Role While Belfast City Council has a role in facilitating events and working with partners to promote public safety and wellbeing, responsibility for drug testing services, controlled drug licensing, public health policy and substance misuse strategy rests primarily with central government departments and statutory agencies.</p>
3.12	<p>At present, there is no legislative framework, funding mechanism or operational model in place that would enable Belfast City Council to establish or directly deliver drug and pill testing facilities at events.</p>
3.13	<p>Officers will continue to engage with relevant partners and monitor developments in legislation, policy and best practice.</p>

3.14	Members should note that responsibility for drug testing services, licensing and substance misuse policy rests primarily with the Department of Health and other statutory agencies.
4.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
4.1	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage. Any future proposal involving pilot testing facilities would require detailed consideration of resource requirements, governance arrangements, licensing obligations and funding sources.</p>
4.2	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report at this stage.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Appendices</u></p> <p>Appendix 1 – Notice of Motion: Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals.</p>