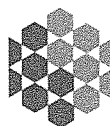


FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY
Edwin Poots MLA



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Mr Henry Downey
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Your Ref: HD/FW

Our Ref: COR/147/2014

Date: 20 February 2014

Dear Henry

Thank you for your letter of 7 February informing me of Belfast City Council's recent Notice of Motion on New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

I launched the cross-sectoral strategy, *New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD) Phase 2*, to reduce the harm related to both alcohol and drug misuse in Northern Ireland in January 2012. NSD Phase 2 seeks to direct action across five pillars: prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research. One of the emerging issues highlighted in NSD Phase 2 is the availability of NPS.

These NPS can, and do cause real harm, not only to health and well-being, but also in terms of related anti-social behaviour and criminal activities. In addition, like Belfast City Council, I have deep concerns that the availability of NPS, and the operation of "Head Shops" in particular, are creating social norms around drug misuse more generally. I understand that good joint work is underway between the PSNI and Belfast City Council on this issue and I believe this has the potential to begin to tackle the issue of "head shops" selling these substances on our high street. I would very much appreciate if the Council could keep me informed of developments in due course.

As the Council highlights in the Notice of Motion, I recently raised this issue with the Home Secretary, setting out my concerns about the accessibility of NPS and seeking a more robust and consistent approach to addressing this issue across the UK. In response to this, the Home Office has now announced a review of how the UK's legislative response can be enhanced beyond the existing measures of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. I am pleased that the review will be informed by a range of evidence, including the various international approaches I highlighted to the Home Secretary, including the Republic of Ireland, the USA and New Zealand. It is anticipated that this review will be completed by Spring 2014.

I believe it is essential that we take a consistent approach across the UK for any efforts to be effective and I welcome the fact that NI will be part of this review. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank Belfast City Council for its support in this matter and I look forward to the Council's continued support in the months and years ahead.



Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety