

INDEPENDENT WESTERN BAY (NEATH PORT TALBOT AND SWANSEA) DRUGS COMMISSION

INITIAL CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Immediate release...

A new independent commission set up to explore the high number of drug-related deaths in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot is calling for communities to get involved.

Anyone affected by problematic drug or alcohol use – personally, or through relatives or friends; professionals or interested members of the public, are being invited to tell their stories to help drive the new commission's work.

Neath Port Talbot and Swansea have consistently recorded the highest rates of drug-related deaths across all Welsh Health Board areas. During 2021-22, there were 41 recorded drug misuse deaths, at a rate of 11.3 per 100,000 population.

In response, the Western Bay Area Planning Board for Substance Misuse (APB) has launched the independent Western Bay Drugs Commission.

The new Commission will:

- Consider the nature, extent, and impact of substance use across the region.
- Specifically explore drug-related harms and deaths (inclusive of illegal, illicit, prescription and alcohol use).
- Have active regard for the wider (cultural, economic, familial, psychological, and social) determinants and influences of problematic substance use.
- Be a critical friend to all stakeholders (local commissioners, communities, leaders, and providers).
- Use and adapt learning from the Swansea Poverty Truth Commission Model.
- Use, and adapt where necessary, the independent Dundee Drugs Commission Model ([Dundee Drugs Commission | Dundee City Council](#)).
- Ensure that our final report includes recommendations on additional priorities for practical and achievable action.

Co-Chair of the Western Bay Drugs Commission Sara Hayes said: "All voices have an important contribution to make and will be heard by the Commission – we are here to listen with transparency and empathy.

"Whilst the starting position of high drug deaths is known, the conclusion is unknown. We will focus on positive messages that instil hope. In undertaking a collaborative journey we will support the development of trust between everyone."

Her co-chair Julian Williams said: “We are keen to hear the experience of anyone that helps us understand the strengths and challenges of services and the problems facing people who use illicit or illegal drugs, and their family members and friends.

“We would encourage anyone who wants to be heard to complete our initial call for evidence or to make contact directly with the Commission.”

The independence of the Commission will enable it to be rigorous in its process whilst also acknowledging the challenges faced by local services. There will be considerable emphasis given to the voices of those with lived and living experience of drug use, and those affected (families, friends, and carers).

In order for the Commission to identify the priority areas for investigation the Commission would like to invite anyone who wants to comment to do so, whether they are someone affected by drug and/or alcohol use (their own or someone else’s); a professional; or a member of the public.

A copy of the initial call for evidence can be obtained by emailing Commission facilitator Andy Perkins at WBDrugsCommission@outlook.com or by completing it directly at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/WBDC-Initial-Call-For-Evidence>

All responses will be kept anonymous and any identifying information will be removed.

The Drugs Commission has now also started a programme of meetings to be held in public, where evidence will be gathered from local, national, and international experts. These meetings will be open to any interested party to come and observe the discussions (subject to venue capacity).

The next meeting will be held in Neath on Wednesday 26th April 2023. Further details of this meeting and future meetings can be obtained from Andy Perkins (facilitator of the Drugs Commission) at WBDrugsCommission@outlook.com or via the Western Bay Drugs Commission webpage at: [Western Bay Drugs Commission - Figure 8 Consultancy](#)

Notes to editors:

At a joint meeting of the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Public Services Boards in October 2020 a paper was submitted and approved for establishing an ‘Integrated Public Health Model for Substance Misuse in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot’ as the key driver for transforming substance (drug and alcohol) use services. One of the five key recommendations for action from this paper was to establish an expert advisory panel to support the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Western Bay Area Planning Board for Substance Misuse (APB) and to act as a critical friend.

Western Bay APB formally agreed to explore this approach and appointed Figure 8 Consultancy Services Ltd. (Dundee, Scotland) to set up and facilitate an independent Commission (expert panel) that can identify and investigate the key causes and consequences of the harms associated with drug use (in particular, drug-related deaths) for individuals and their families; and subsequently recommend robust and realistic policy and practical measures to address these. Figure 8 were approached to support this work as they were responsible for setting up and facilitating the work of the independent Dundee Drugs Commission ([Dundee Drugs Commission | Dundee City Council](#)) between 2018-2022.

The Western Bay Drugs Commission was initially set up at the end of 2022 and is now beginning the important task of engaging with communities to collect evidence.

Further information regarding the profile of drug related deaths and harms across Wales can be found in the following Public Health Wales annual publications:

[Harm Reduction Database Wales: Drug related mortality 2021-22 \(nhs.wales\)](#)

[Data Mining Wales: The annual profile for substance misuse 2021-22](#)

Ends