

UK ministers meet to drive progress on tackling drug misuse

Yesterday (Monday 11 October) government ministers and experts from across the home nations came together to discuss new ways to tackle illegal drug use across the UK, and the devastation it causes.

Held in Belfast, the Home Nations Drugs Ministerial focused on strong collaboration across the nations as crucial for finding solutions to all aspects of drug misuse.

Key issues discussed included cutting off supply routes for drugs, effective treatment and recovery systems, and how to end county lines networks – where vulnerable children and adults are exploited by organised crime gangs to transport drugs and cash.

The Ministerial was chaired by the Crime and Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse, who said:

This was our third Home Nations drug summit and the collective determination to confront the harm and degradation that drugs bring was strongly reaffirmed.

This is a complex and deep-rooted challenge, and there was strong recognition that we all benefit from working together to prevent drug deaths and build stronger neighbourhoods.

The Crime and Policing Minister was joined by Northern Ireland Executive's Health Minister, Robin Swann (MLA) and Justice Minister, Naomi Long (MLA), the Scottish Government's Minister for Drugs Policy, Angela Constance (MSP) and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Lynne Neagle (MS) from Welsh government.

Experts in the field of drug misuse were also present, including Professor Dame Carol Black, the government's independent adviser on drugs, and Professor Catriona Matheson, Chair of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, who provided further insight on reducing drug deaths and harms.

Representatives from several police forces across the UK shared their perspectives from the frontline.

The meeting follows the UK Drugs Summits held in Glasgow in February 2020 and virtual UK Drugs Ministerial which took place virtually in September 2020. The UK government has a comprehensive strategy for addressing the problems associated with drug misuse in action, which includes:

- appointing Dame Carol Black as an independent adviser to drive forward progress in this area

- setting up Project ADDER, an innovative approach which combines tough, targeted law enforcement with improved treatment and recovery services – the project is now up and running in 13 areas across England and Wales
- supporting the police to expand capability to drug test suspects on arrest, in order to help develop an evidence base of the links between drugs and criminality and identify those who may need support or treatment
- commissioning the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to review the drivers of young people’s powder cocaine use in order to inform further action
- announcing £148 million of new investment to cut crime and protect people from the scourge of illegal drugs – the package includes the largest increase in drug treatment funding for 15 years, as well as additional money to help police forces shut down county lines gangs