



Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No.11/15

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Member Briefing on Medway Drug Related Death Panel

By: Peter Gates, Commissioning Officer and Development Officer.

To: Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

The following paper provides an overview on the work of the Medway Drug and Alcohol Action Team to contribute to reductions in the deaths of drug users in the Medway area.

1 Introduction

- 1(1) A recent Office of National Statistics report on the numbers of drug related deaths in the country reported an annual increase for a second year, particularly amongst opiate users. This rise was also apparent in the Medway area, with 41 recorded drug related deaths between 2012 and 2014 compared to 27 in the previous three years. Whilst the reasons for this national and local increase are not fully understood, there are a range of factors that could have contributed to greater risk of overdose amongst drug users - the purity of heroin has increased in the last 2 years; use of illicit prescription medication for pain relief by opiate users has significantly grown; finally, the opiate using population has aged.
- 1(2) The Medway Drug and Alcohol Action Team (MDAAT) Board is committed to directly supporting strategies and interventions to reduce the number of drug related deaths both in the County and in Medway, including the introduction of improvements to reporting processes. This

includes the preparation of an annual presentation to the Board and Community Safety Partnership.

2 Responding to Drug Related Deaths

- 2(1) There has been a county wide reporting process for drug related deaths in place for Kent and Medway for over 10 years; Medway drug treatment services have contributed individual reports to this process.
- 2(2) During 2014, the Director of Public Health in Medway explored concerns about the need for a focus on individual drug related deaths in Medway, to identify key learning points from incidents and implement actions that may reduce the likelihood of further deaths due to similar circumstances. This focus has led to the introduction of the following measures:
- 2(3) **Medway Drug and Alcohol Death Reporting Process** – It can be challenging to ensure that all deaths are reported appropriately. However, in partnership with Kent Police, the Kent Coroner's Officers, Medway's drug treatment service and other partners, reporting processes are being improved to ensure that all drug related deaths are identified and reviewed so that appropriate actions can be taken promptly.
- 2(4) **Medway Drug Related Death Panel** – The Panel meets on a quarterly basis, to undertake a detailed review of each death and identify actions that can be taken by partners to reduce further similar incidents. The panel membership includes representation from Public Health, Kent Police; Kent CRC (probation service); the drug treatment services for adults and young people and supported housing services. Representation has been requested from Medway Council Adult Mental Health Social Work Services and Medway Council Homelessness Services and Adult Social Care. There have been 4 known deaths of heroin users since 1st April 2015.
- 2(5) **Actions to reduce drug related deaths** –actions that have been taken in response to drug related death reviews include :
- The distribution of Naloxone, an opiate antagonist which reverses the effects of opiates, directly to drug injectors and their families.
 - Ensuring that all of Medway's GP's refer patients who use heroin to the specialist adult treatment services.
 - Production and distribution of specific information about the increased risks associated with alcohol use and injecting heroin for homeless opiate users.
 - Delivery of overdose management training to staff in supported housing services in Medway.
 - Ensuring that adults who drop out of drug treatment are contacted directly and encouraged to come back to services.

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