

# **Angela Constance appointed as Drugs Policy Minister**

**Angela Constance, the former Education Secretary until 2016, and Cabinet Secretary for Communities Social Security and Equalities until 2018 will replace Public Health Minister Joe FitzPatrick in dealing with drug deaths.**

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has appointed her as a dedicated Minister for Drug Policy to lead The Scottish Government's work on tackling and reducing the harm of drug misuse, supporting the rehabilitation and recovery of those living with drug addiction, and reducing the unacceptable number of deaths from drugs.

The new Minister will report directly to the First Minister. Ms Sturgeon told parliament at FMQs yesterday that the number of deaths from drug misuse was indefensible. She said then in answer to a question from Ruth Davidson about drug deaths: "The figures that were published this week are completely unacceptable and no one will hear political answers from me on the subject today. We have much to do to sort this out—and sorting it out is our responsibility, and it is a serious responsibility.

"Behind every one of the statistics is a human being whose life mattered: someone's son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister. I say that I am sorry to every family who

has suffered grief. Every person who dies an avoidable death because of drug abuse has been let down.

“The fact is that the issue is difficult and complex, but that is not an excuse. There is much work under way, which is being led by the public health minister and the drug deaths task force. However, the figures tell us that we need to do more and quicker.

“The next meeting of the task force will take place on 12 January. I will attend the meeting to take stock with the task force and to consider what further, immediate steps we need to take. I will make a statement in the chamber before the end of January after I have had that discussion, to set out what further steps we intend to take.

“Undoubtedly, part of that will involve rehabilitation facilities. We have been doing mapping work—we asked a working group to do that. Between the private sector, the third sector and the public sector, there are 365 rehabilitation beds across the country. We are not satisfied that that is necessarily sufficient, or that they are being used sufficiently.

“That is not the only issue; it is one of the issues that require to be considered properly and fully as we move forward to discharge that responsibility for sorting out something that is completely unacceptable. I think that all of us take that view.”

Angela Constance has been asked by the First Minister to fill the role between now and the election. Her appointment will be put to Parliament for approval next week.

Prior to entering elected politics Ms Constance served as a social worker, including working with people with a history of drug misuse and families living with the consequences of addiction. In her time as a Cabinet Secretary she also led the government’s early work on the impact of Adverse Childhood

Experiences and as Communities Secretary worked on poverty and homelessness, giving her a broad perspective on the challenges faced by some of those who are at risk of dying from drug misuse.

A new Minister for Public Health to replace Mr FitzPatrick will be nominated on Monday.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "Scotland's record on drug deaths is simply not good enough and as First Minister I know we have much more to do.

"As a first step I have decided to appoint a dedicated minister, working directly alongside me, whose job it will be to work across government to improve outcomes for people whose lives are affected by drugs.

"We must not accept a situation in which people who use drugs are allowed to fall through the cracks, with so many dying premature and avoidable deaths as a result. Behind the statistics are real people whose lives matter, and I am absolutely determined that we take actions to fix this."



Angela Constance photographed in 2018 on a visit to Dr Bell's Family Centre Photo The Edinburgh Reporter

Angela Constance said: "It is a privilege to be asked to work with the First Minister to address this challenge.

"I intend to get straight down to business, meeting with people who are at risk of dying from drugs, learning from the families of those we have lost and working with those in our communities and public health teams who are providing such valuable support.

"Government can and will do more and I am determined to use the short time before the election to work with the Drug Death Taskforce on the actions necessary to reduce Scotland's drug deaths and better support those living with addiction."