

Plans to set up a consumption room in Edinburgh depend on outcome in Glasgow

Plans to set up a safe consumption room in Edinburgh are moving forward, after drug-related deaths reached the highest ever rate in the city last year.

Work on a study looking at the cost and possible location of a facility is underway whilst the legal case continues to be made for drug consumption rooms (DCR).

Previous bids by Glasgow's city council for a DCR have been rejected by the UK Government, and a report to councillors said plans for one in Edinburgh would not be able to proceed "until Glasgow's more advanced process is completed and the legal issues are clearer".

It added that Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership is working with The Scottish Government, the Crown Office, Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland to test legal options.

In the meantime, Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (EADP) has begun the process of initiating a feasibility study on a DCR, also known as an an Overdose Prevention Centre or 'fix room', after councillors backed the move in July.

There were 109 drug-related deaths recorded in Edinburgh in 2021, up from 95 in 2020 – and the highest ever number in a

single year in the city.

The report, which went before the policy and sustainability committee on Tuesday (November 1), said DCRs are known to “have a 100 per cent record of preventing drug-related deaths within them and do attract high risk drug users to their safer premises”.

Cllr Finlay McFarlane, who has championed the introduction of consumption rooms since his election to the council in May, attacked politicians at Westminster for blocking previous attempts to roll-out the overdose prevention measures.

But Labour’s Mandy Watt hit back, saying the problem should not be used for “political knock about”.

Touching on her personal experience with the issue, she said: “Five friends of mine from when I was younger have died because of drugs.”

She added: “This isn’t a party political thing, it’s not a chance to take shots at whichever government or council you don’t like.”

And Cllr Watt said some people living in areas where drug-related deaths rates are higher on average are concerned consumption rooms will become ‘a magnet for drug dealers’.

“There’s no points to be scored here. Something has to be done to end these really sad deaths,” she said.

Cllr Alex Staniforth said: “It’s good to take a medical rather than a criminal approach to addiction, I think that’s an excellent move on behalf of the city.”

Council leader Cammy Day, added: “109 deaths is 109 too many and anything we can do to try and prevent that we absolutely should.”

The study by EADP will look at “identifying a model consistent

with local need and facilities”.

“It would also identify the costs entailed and possible sources of funding through Scottish Government, EADP and other routes. The study would define options for Edinburgh to potentially act if the legal situation becomes clearer (through the work by Glasgow),” the report stated.

The partnership is set to report back to the council by June 2023.



Cllr Finlay McFarlane

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“This report sets out the level of certainty and understanding from all spheres that drug consumption rooms work.

“Health professionals are clear in their support for a DCR in the city to tackle drug-related deaths. The community of drug users – 81 per cent when asked – were clear in their support.

“And this report itself makes it clear that where drug consumption rooms are easily available in areas of concentrated public injecting, rates of drug-related deaths fall.”

Mr Mcfarlane also pleaded with Tory councillors to “work through the lines of communication” within their party in a bid to influence the UK Government’s policy direction and attitude towards DCRs.

By Donald Turvill

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