

# **Councillor advocates safe words for safe rooms**

**In the first full year since my election in 2022, the number of people who lost their lives from an overdose in Edinburgh rose to 113 people. That's 113 sons and daughters or 113 friends or loved ones.**

The scale of loss is only made tragic by the fact that it is likely that each of these 113 deaths were entirely preventable. Whilst the national picture in Scotland showed a welcome decline, Edinburgh has bucked the trend with an increase in the figures from the previous year.

Since my election, I have championed and won the support for a public health approach to this crisis in Edinburgh. Unanimously, the Council have agreed to state that they neither condone nor condemn drug use, and that we will do all we can to explore all possible tools to address the crisis. I am proud that every party in the Council have taken such a pragmatic, and compassionate approach to the debate, whether we were exploring expanding the provision of the life-saving Naloxone across the city or commissioning the feasibility study into a safe consumption room and community drug checking facilities.

It was therefore highly regrettable to see a local publication sensationalise the long-awaited move towards a Safe

Consumption Room in Edinburgh in their headline stating that a “heroin shooting gallery” was lined up for the city centre. Language matters.

We are living with the effects of decades of stigmatisation and prejudice through the failed UK “war on drugs” that marginalised people and increased the barriers to seeking support. It is my hope that the spirit of unity which has so far prevailed in the City Chambers is reflected by society at large as we move towards the implementation of these solutions and it will be incumbent on us all to remember that addiction could affect any one of us as a very human condition. Through careful language and tone we have the power to unpick historical prejudice and misconceptions about our fellow citizens.

Perhaps from now on we should refer to these health facilities – to remind ourselves as to their primary function – as Overdose Prevention Centres.

[Councillor Finlay McFarlane represents the City Centre ward.](#)



Cllr Finlay McFarlane