

Officials told to publish consumption room study

Councillors call for the completed report into opening a drug consumption room to be made public this week

The report setting out the findings of a feasibility study into a safe consumption facility in the city was not due to be released until next month – a year later than originally planned – but now councillors have voted to make it public online by the end of this week.

Campaigners say the study, commissioned in 2022, has been “finished for a long time” but continues to be kept “hidden” from the public. They claim it concludes a drug consumption room (DCR) in the capital “will save lives” by reducing the number of overdoses.

Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) disputed there had been delays and said the paper was only completed in January as it had to go through academic checks.

Plans to pilot DCRs – also called overdose prevention centres – in Edinburgh and Glasgow look set to go ahead after the Scottish Government confirmed it would not be in the public interest to prosecute users for possession.

The feasibility study – led by Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (EADP) – has investigated the “local appetite” for a safe place for people to inject drugs, where one could open and its potential to reduce harm.

The latest statistics show there were 113 drug-related deaths across the city in 2022, the highest figure ever recorded.

Those who support establishing DCRs say they will be essential to tackling the rate of drug deaths in Scotland – which remains the highest in Europe – however critics argue there is limited evidence and that they could encourage drug use.

Campaigners from Safe Consumption Facility Edinburgh, who demonstrated outside the City Chambers ahead of a full council meeting on Thursday (February 8), called for the authority to publish its research so plans can be progressed.

Joe Barnes, from the group, told the LDRS: “We’re quite surprised the council is refusing to publish that study to the public and then take that study into account.

“We’ve spoken to researchers who have been either involved in the study or tangentially to it. We know the study says these are good and will save lives and save money at the end of the day.

“It’s been ready for several months, it’s been kicked down the road. We need to see it.

“The longer they kick this down the road, the more people will die so we need to get this done.”

He said the group was encouraging the council to set aside money to fund the trial then “establish a plan and then start getting the foundations laid as soon as that funding is available”.

Independent councillor Ross McKenzie tabled a motion which said it was regretful that “rapid action has not been taken, and that the timeline for receipt of the feasibility study has been repeatedly extended”.

Passed unanimously, the motion called for the feasibility study to be published on the council’s website in full by the

end of the week and a report with next steps to go before the policy and sustainability committee on March 12.

In addition councillors agreed the council leader should request a meeting with the Scottish Government to “discuss the feasibility study and to identify funding sources”.

Cllr McKenzie said: “I think given the timeline we should not accept any further delays.”

The Labour administration withdrew its amendment to hold-off publication until next month.

Labour councillor Tim Pogson apologised for delays and told the chamber there was “nothing being hidden here” .

An Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership spokesperson said: “The Partnership has commissioned a feasibility study into safe drug consumption rooms which has reported and is currently being considered by Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership. We are committed to rigorously examining the findings of this paper.

“Any future action on drug consumption rooms will be dependent on legal clarification by the Scottish Government, the position of the Lord Advocate and funding availability.

The EHSCP and other members of the alcohol and drugs partnership are working hard to minimise drug deaths by improving access to treatment, harm reduction and recovery opportunities.”



Campaigners from Safe Consumption Facility Edinburgh
He said it was a “very complex area of work” and the report’s release date had been repeatedly pushed back to allow “ethical considerations” of the study, while agreeing to work with officials to publish it this week.