

‘Rapid rise’ in people injecting cocaine

Concerns have been raised over a “rapid rise” in the number of people injecting cocaine in Edinburgh, as plans to introduce safe consumption rooms look set to go ahead.

Drug users who spoke to the researchers studying safer drug consumption facilities (SDCF) said the practice had “become widespread” and “changed the dynamics of the local drug scene”.

The city, along with the rest of the UK, is also facing increased levels of synthetic opiates in the supply chain, such as nitazenes – thought to be 100 times stronger than heroin.

And the “increased availability” of street valium is also a “key concern” in the capital, representing a “major shift in drug use patterns”.

The study, carried out by researchers at Stirling University for the council and Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, recommended setting up several facilities in consumption ‘hotspots’ like the Old Town, Leith and Niddrie as a way of reducing the number of fatal overdoses.

The research could pave the way for a trial scheme, likely in the city centre, following approval of a pilot SDCF in Glasgow expected to open later this year.

Many participants with lived experience of illegal drug use highlighted “a rapid increase in the levels of cocaine

injecting in the city,” a report detailing findings said. It added: “Participants noted that injected cocaine use often involves much higher frequency of injection and leads to different behavioural responses to injected heroin.”

One interviewee said cocaine use had “gone through the roof” in Edinburgh and “a lot of folk have started to inject it”.

Another said injecting cocaine – also called ‘prop’ – was “the biggest like outbreak I’ve seen in the last couple for years,” adding: “It’s an epidemic...it’s actually shook the town to be honest.”

The report continued: “A key concern in Edinburgh is the increased availability and use of novel/synthetic benzodiazepines (often referred to as ‘street benzos’). Street benzos can be much more potent than traditionally prescribed benzodiazepines but are often designed to replicate the appearance of prescribed medicines such as diazepam.

“Because they are generally consumed as pills, benzodiazepines also imply different harm reduction responses that may complicate the assessment of risks and harms within an SDCF.

“At the same time, Edinburgh – alongside the rest of the UK – faces the prospect of increased levels of synthetic opioids in the drug supply chain. 2023 saw spikes in drug deaths in a number of regions across the UK that were associated with nitazenes and other synthetic opioids.”

Councillors will meet next month to discuss the report and next steps toward launching a pilot in Edinburgh.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



A safer drug consumption facility (SDCF) in Vancouver, Canada.
Image: City of Edinburgh Council/Stirling University.