

New framework launched to improve treatment of addiction in West Lothian

A new framework has been put in place to improve treatment of addiction in West Lothian and also provide better support to those in need of help.

The Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) will also look to develop services for those with addictions to seek early intervention as well as working with primary health care services to offer training and skills.

Drug related deaths have hovered around the 30 mark in the county in recent years. In contrast, the number of alcohol specific deaths spiked in West Lothian during two years of the Covid lockdown.

More than 80 people in the county died alcohol-specific deaths during the pandemic. Those numbers fell back to 28 in 2023.

Across Scotland health and social care partnerships are required to provide a clear plan for strategy, commissioning, service delivery, prevention, evaluation and assurance.

The comprehensive plan sets out a long-term health care programme with targeted interventions for all at risk groups including homeless people, as well as education programmes for families and for young people.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service reported last year: “The number of alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland remains the highest since 2008, according to figures published today by National Records of Scotland.

“In total, 1,277 deaths were attributed to alcohol-specific causes in 2023, an increase of one death from 2022.

National records for Scotland said last September: “Those aged 45-64 and 65-74 continue to have the highest mortality rates. If we look at the average age at death, that has risen over time.

“Alcohol-specific deaths were 4.5 times as high in the most deprived areas of Scotland compared to the least deprived areas in 2023.

Alison White, Director for West Lothian’s Health and Social Care Partnership told councillors this week that consultations have been extensive, involving charities such as Change Grow Live which work with those experiencing addiction, council departments such as housing and social justice, as well as health services.

The plan is considered a “live document” which will be regularly reported back to the council and NHS trust related committees. A report to the Social Work and Health Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) said: “The plan is complex, the document will not remain static and is intended to become a working plan, flexible to meet future needs and to aid planning, testing and implementation of ideas.

“This will be a necessary step to make improvements, with a current timeline up to 2028.”

Mrs White told councillors: “The overarching aim of this plan is to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and substances via the commissioning, monitoring and delivery of relevant services.

“The plan will remain agile with the potential to respond appropriately to national policy development and a changing local landscape.”

Among the first jobs will be to to develop prevention and early intervention activities.

The biggest job facing the ADP is in increasing public awareness of alcohol and drug harm and how it impacts on the wider determinants of the health of individuals.

While drug and alcohol deaths in West Lothian are not the highest in Scotland the toll of alcohol and drug abuse has grown steadily on individuals requiring treatment for chronic ill health and for wider society.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter