

Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists – Derby’s response

SUMMARY

- 1.1 Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs) are research chemicals designed to mimic the psychoactive properties of cannabis. Formerly known to be part of the ‘legal high’ or Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS) class of compounds, they have become (collectively and erroneously) known as ‘Mamba’ or ‘Spice’.
- 1.2 Legislative changes were put in place to control NPS use, eventually resulting in SCRAs becoming controlled substances.
- 1.3 Users experience almost instantaneous intoxication with accompanied hallucinations, disassociation and delirium. It is very distressing to on-lookers as this state is frequently accompanied by screaming and incapacitation. Shortly thereafter users become soporific and often automaton-like – leading to the common euphemism ‘Zombie’. Recovery from this state is relatively quick, often within 15 mins. There are very few reported fatalities from the consumption of SCRAs.
- 1.4 The short acting nature of SCRAs leads to repeated and frequent dosing by users. Despite the side effects, the drug is positively reinforcing leading to psychological dependence. Treatment is problematic and is largely based on Motivational Interviewing and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. There is no substitute or symptomatic prescribing option available.
- 1.5 In 2015 Derby City launched its three-year ‘Partnership Novel Psychoactive Substances Strategy’. The focus of the strategy was to:
 - reduce the supply of NPSs;
 - raise awareness through education in schools;
 - safeguard young people;
 - enhance treatment options;
 - gather intelligence about the size of the problem.In the context of these strategic objectives the strategy was successful.
- 1.6 In early 2017, however, it became apparent that the prohibition of SCRAs resulted in the transformation of the local NPS problem. New, more problematic and highly visible SCRA use emerged in Derby City centre - almost exclusively within homeless and marginalised communities. There was also an increase in concomitant aggressive

begging and drug-related, distressing antisocial behaviour.

- 1.7 Key stakeholders and partners quickly responded to the new threat by establishing the 'Partnership Engagement and Enforcement Programme' (PEEP). A daily, virtual tasking group (with a dedicated co-ordinator) that directs partnership resources within the city centre to tackle visible, on-street problematic substance misuse and antisocial behaviour.
- 1.8 The premise of PEEP is simple. Clients can engage with drug and alcohol treatment services; receive medical help and support; engage with accommodation services (and be housed); access food provision; access emergency accommodation; comply with probation and court orders (often imposed on them); and desist from committing antisocial behaviour and/or begging in the city centre. If they do not to comply they face enforcement sanctions.
- 1.9 Since June 2017 PEEP has operated in Derby City Centre and has proved very effective. A Derby High Court judge recently commended partners on the efficacy of the programme for reducing visible anti-social behaviour and tackling substance misuse in the city centre. A detailed breakdown of the year-to-date performance and outcomes of the PEEP programme is discussed in Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the issues identified within this report and the local partnership response in place to tackle the problem.
- 2.2 To receive the new Partnership Substance Misuse Strategy (2018 – 2021) once launched.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To ensure that the Board is fully aware of the current issues within the city relating to the use of SCRAs and to provide assurance that an appropriate response is in place.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs) are research chemicals designed to mimic the psychoactive properties of cannabis and were formerly known to be part of the 'legal high' or Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS) class of compounds, they have become (collectively and erroneously) known as 'Mamba' or 'Spice'. Mamba was a widely used trade name for various SCRAs sprayed on leaves to be smoked in a similar manner to Cannabis – and sold prior to legislative changes.
- 4.2 In 2016 the Psychoactive Substance Act was passed as an attempt to control the growing harms and concerns caused by NPS use. The Act proved ineffective, so later the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) 1971 was amended to make SCRAs controlled substances – with the same robust penalties for possession, supply and production as other harmful drugs.

- 4.3 The effect of smoking nearly all SCRA is broadly similar – and very *dissimilar* to the consumption of Cannabis. Users experience almost instantaneous intoxication with accompanied hallucinations, disassociation, delirium and incapacitation. This can be distressing to on-lookers as it can resemble a near-death experience for the user.
- 4.4 The drug is positively reinforcing leading to psychological dependence and recent evidence also suggests that a markedly unpleasant ‘withdrawal syndrome’ also occurs when regular SCRA users desist which further reinforces dependence.
- 4.5 In 2015 Derby City launched its three-year ‘Partnership Novel Psychoactive Substances Strategy’. In the first year all retail outlets supplying (then legal) NPS were closed down; all schools had embedded awareness raising campaigns; use of NPS amongst school age children diminished; and the number of attendances at A&E (for NPS related intoxication) halved. Similarly successful was the sustained engagement and commitment of key partners and stakeholders across the city.
- 4.6 In early 2017, however, it became apparent that the prohibition of SCRA (through the MDA 1971) had resulted in the transformation of the local NPS problem. New, more problematic and highly visible SCRA use emerged in Derby City centre with associated aggressive begging and antisocial behaviour. At its height (summer 2017), ‘Mamba’ drug-related ambulance call outs to the city centre – to deal with what euphemistically became known as ‘Mamba attacks’ – peaked at 23 in a single day (corresponding to 52 client episodes).
- 4.7 Key stakeholders and partners quickly responded to the new threat by establishing the ‘Partnership Engagement and Enforcement Programme’ (PEEP). The partnership resources currently deployed include: city centre police officers; treatment providers; outreach workers; homeless charities; city centre rangers; accommodation providers and the probation service. A monthly steering group oversees the performance of PEEP and undertakes detailed case discussions of those identified as on - or relevant to - the programme. High level details are discussed at the quarterly Police and Crime Commissioner’s city centre summit.
- 4.8 If clients do not comply they face enforcement sanctions. These sanctions include: arrests for breaching antisocial and exclusion prohibitive orders; issuance of criminal behaviour orders; and prosecutions for associated offences - that can result in short custodial sentences.
- 4.9 Since June 2017 PEEP has operated in Derby City Centre and has proved very effective. A detailed breakdown of the year-to-date performance and outcomes of the PEEP programme is provided in Appendix 2, but of particular note is that of the 48 clients referred into the programme between June 2017 and January 2018, 21 ‘exited’ the scheme (*i.e.* were removed from the ‘main list’) and have not returned. Reasons for programme exit include: no longer a visible on-street begging drug user; has commenced and sustained substance misuse treatment; and has secured accommodation – *i.e.* no longer homeless and visible.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Cate Edwynn, Director of Public Health Hardyal Dhindsa, Police and Crime Commissioner
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Richard.martin@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Performance and Outcomes of the PEEP Programme

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

Legal

- 2.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

Personnel

- 3.1 There are no personnel implications directly arising from this report.

IT

- 4.1 There are no IT implications directly arising from this report.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report.

Health and Safety

- 6.1 There are no health and safety implications directly arising from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.1 There are no environmental sustainability implications directly arising from this report.

Property and Asset Management

- 8.1 There are no property and asset management implications directly arising from this report.

Risk Management and Safeguarding

- 9.1 There are no risk management or safeguarding implications directly arising from this report. To note, however, that the response outlined in this paper reduces the risks posed to individual and community health and wellbeing by the use of SCRAs.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 10.1 The response outlined in this report supports the Council and Derby Plan objectives

in relation to health and wellbeing.

Appendix 2

PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES OF THE PEEP PROGRAMME

In addition to traditional treatment interventions for problematic substance misusers (delivered by Derby's Integrated Substance Misuse treatment system) and homelessness interventions commissioned by Derby Homes, PEEP is the City's response specifically aimed at substance misuse that has particular attendant circumstances. Proactive engagement of extremely hard-to-reach groups, PEEP has grown out of the needs of partners to tackle wide-ranging complex, visible, social and Policing issues. The PEEP initiative is aimed at clients with the following criteria:

- Drug or alcohol use that is visible and taking place in the city centre
- Substance misuse taking place in the City centre fuelled by aggressive or intimidating begging
- Visible, on-street use of Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists likely to cause distress to members of the public
- Homelessness that results from problematic substance misuse and that has associated antisocial elements.

Case management of clients within the scope of the PEEP initiative is discharged through the active coordination of three 'lists' (via daily tasking and monthly partnership review). Over the lifetime of the programme (June 2017 – to date) 48 individuals have been targeted for some form of action (39 males and 9 females). They all met some if not all of the criteria defined above. The age range of PEEP clients was 18 – 55 with 47% of them being between 36 and 45 (and entrenched substance misusers historically cycling in and out of treatment).

32 clients were identified as meeting all of the PEEP criteria and were included on a daily proactive taking list – 'the main list'. Of these, 28 of were confirmed as homeless and rough sleepers with concurrent problematic substance misuse.

Success of the PEEP initiative can be judged by considering the following desirable outcomes:

- Numbers of clients entering and remaining in substance misuse treatment - and who desist from problematic, visible substance misuse
- Numbers of clients with improved and stable social functioning (including uptake of accommodation and reduction of homelessness)
- Reduction in on-street aggressive and intimidating begging
- Reduction in visible anti-social behaviour in the City centre.

To date the programme has achieved the following outcomes - and has facilitated associated coercive actions:

- 21 PEEP clients have entered drug and alcohol treatment services

- 12 clients sustained accommodation for 4 weeks or more – and are no longer homeless
- 11 clients have been transferred from the 'main (proactive tasking) list' to a monitoring situation where there have been significant improvements in a number of the PEEP criteria
- 394 dispersals orders have been issued by the Police to remove PEEP clients from the City centre and deter begging
- 21 arrests have been made for begging in criminal circumstances
- 5 Criminal Behaviour Orders have been granted by the courts
- 11 PEEP clients have been given custodial sentences for breaching orders (dispersal or Criminal Behaviour) associated with aggressive begging, drug dealing or antisocial behaviour
- 7 clients have reported changing their lifestyle because of the disruptive nature of the PEEP programme – begging is not lucrative anymore and treatment is easier.

In April 2018 Derby City will launch its new Partnership Substance Misuse Strategy (2018 – 2021), alongside its newly commissioned Integrated Substance Misuse treatment system (and consolidating its Partnership [Novel] Psychoactive Substance strategy. The new strategy and delivery vehicles will refocus efforts on engaging hard-to-reach substance misusers; minimising harms caused by problematic drug use through effective treatment; and slowing the rise in drug-related deaths. Proactive engagement and coordination will play a pivotal role in achieving these strategic aims.