

PRESS STATEMENT

Name change for County Wexford Local Drugs Task Force

At the last meeting of the County Wexford Local Drugs Task Force held on the 17th April it was unanimously agreed to change the task force name to the County Wexford Drugs and Alcohol Task Force. Membership of the Wexford task force includes the HSE, the Gardai, the Probation Service, FAS, the Department of Social Protection, the Local Authority, Customs & Excise, the Community Based Drugs Initiative, the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service, Wexford Local Development, the Ais Eiri Treatment Centre, the Cornmarket Project and the Wexford Addiction Family Support Group.

Explaining the reason behind the name change, Paul Delaney chairman of the task force, stated that alcohol has now been included by government under the remit of the national drugs strategy. Mr Delaney also pointed out that alcohol is very often the number one issue affecting people who are in trouble in Wexford because of substance abuse issues and in nearly all cases its abuse ranks very high when other illegal drugs are also being used. For this reason we have decided to concentrate our efforts on alcohol as well as drug abuse to reflect the new emphasis of the national strategy, he said. He further explained that the task force does not believe it is necessary to demonise the majority of people who enjoy a drink responsibly. However, at the same time he stated that it would be unwise to become complacent about the fact that alcohol abuse in Wexford continues to pose a developing and serious problem for many individuals, their families and local communities.

Referring to the latest annual Overview of Drug Misuse report for the South East, published by the HSE in November 2012, which covers counties Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford he stated that the findings have given cause for concern amongst those who sit on the task force. The report gives a breakdown of alcohol and drug misuse based on data collected, collated and reported on from various statutory, voluntary and community agencies involved with substance misuse in the South East. In total, 3,736 individuals were treated in the South East during 2011. Overall, the main problem substances for which people were treated in the South East were alcohol 1,830 (61%), cannabis 498 (16%), heroin 461 (15%) and cocaine 81 (3%). Mr. Delaney stated that the task force was particularly concerned with the data produced for Wexford. Alcohol was the main problem for which Wexford people attended treatment services at 424 individuals (65%). A further 98 individuals presented with problems associated with Cannabis (15%). Heroin was the third main problematic substance for people in Wexford at 74 individuals (11%). Those being treated for problematic cocaine and headshop substance abuse accounted for 14 individuals (2%) and benzodiazepine use accounted for 10 individuals (1%). The number of people in Wexford seeking treatment for an alcohol problem has increased between 2010 and 2011 by 51 individuals (14%). In considering the data, the task force also points out that alcohol was the only substance to show an increase in abuse in Wexford between the two years.

Based on the number of people being treated for an alcohol problem, both as a main and secondary problem, 270 individuals (54%) of Wexford people were categorised as dependent drinkers, followed by those categorised as harmful drinkers at 122 individuals (24%) and then those categorised as hazardous drinkers, 104 individuals (21%). Mr. Delaney also stated that the Wexford task force had discussed the concerns of Prof. Joe Barry of Alcohol Action Ireland who told the Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications on April 17th that “suggestions alcohol sponsorship of sports did not have an effect on alcohol consumption in young people were not true. The average consumption in Ireland for adult drinkers was the equivalent of one bottle of whiskey for each man and woman, per week, and the average age to begin drinking was 15” In addition, the task force referred to the comments of Dr Bobby Smyth, a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist with Alcohol Action Ireland, who told the same Oireachtas Committee that “60,000 children are going to start drinking in Ireland this year”.

Stressing the need for a multi agency approach to alcohol abuse in Wexford, Mr. Delaney speaking on behalf of the task force said: The only way we can effectively tackle what is an insidious and developing problem throughout Wexford, is by having a joined up approach involving all the key agencies concerned with tackling alcohol abuse. He further stated that the task force believes that because the figures in relation to alcohol abuse in Wexford reflect only those seeking treatment, the true number of those who are experiencing problems because of their alcohol abuse is undoubtedly much greater. The chairman also confirmed that the task force would in future now include the tackling of alcohol abuse as a priority along with drugs in County Wexford. In this regard the newly named County Wexford Drugs and Alcohol Task Force will be inviting representative of publicans, vintners and other businesses associated with the supply of alcohol in Wexford to join in discussions on the safer and responsible consumption of alcohol.

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