East Belfast launches RAPID a new scheme to get drugs off the streets

Wednesday 19 June, 2013

RAPID' (Remove all Prescription and Illegal Drugs) is a community safety initiative that promotes the removal of all illegal or unused prescription drugs and new psychoactive substances (often incorrectly referred to as 'legal highs') from the community. People can safely and anonymously deposit drugs in a drug box safe located at Connswater Shopping Centre.

Welcoming the scheme, which has seen the disposal of 450 items during the first three weeks of operation, Health Minister Edwin Poots said: "Substance misuse, whether it is alcohol, illegal drugs, the misuse of prescription drugs, or these new substances, can have a very real and damaging effect on people's physical health and wellbeing, as well as their mental health, relationships, family, friends and community.

"As Health Minister, I have seen all too frequently the devastating impact that substance misuse can have on our society – from the health and social care system, to the economy and the criminal justice sector."

Turning to the costs of drug and alcohol misuse, the Minister continued: "A report commissioned by my Department highlighted that alcohol misuse alone costs us up to £900 million every year, and almost £250 million of these costs are borne by the Health and Social Care Sector. Adding in the costs of drug misuse would bring this figure to over £1 billion.

"However, even these stark figures cannot bring home the individual tragedies and the human cost that substance misuse causes right across Northern Ireland."

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) leads on the cross-departmental strategy to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse on Northern Ireland, known as the 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs'. The RAPID scheme will support two of the key issues set out in that strategy, tackling new psychoactive substances (sometimes incorrectly labelled 'legal highs') and the misuse of prescription drugs.

Concluding, the Minister said: "As well as providing a way of getting potentially dangerous drugs off our streets, RAPID will also allow us the opportunity to test substances and put out clear public health messages to the community.

"This is a great example of partnership working and engagement with the local community. We need to build on this approach and ensure that we continue to work together across sectors and organisations to get the best outcomes for us all."

EDITOR NOTES

1. 'RAPID' (Remove all Prescription and Illegal Drugs) is a community safety initiative between Lower Castlereagh Working Group, District Policing and Community Safety Partnership (DPCSP), Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Forum for Alcohol and Substance Abuse / Community Action Support Team for Drugs & Alcohol (FASA / CAST), Belfast City Council and Connswater Shopping Centre.

2. FASA was formed in 1995 and receives funding from the Public Health Agency (PHA) in respect of Protect Life and New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2.

3. Media enquiries about this press release to DHSSPS Press Office on 028 9052 0074. Out of hours contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715440 and your call will be returned.

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