

Alcohol & Drug Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016 Consultation Response

Western Independent Sector Forum

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The consultation document and questions were circulated to members and a meeting was held with the key agenda item of agreeing a consultation response on 23rd April 2013. The following responses represent the views of the members there present.

Background

The WISF is a leadership forum for community voluntary sector practitioners involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services focused on addressing alcohol and drug use, abuse and misuse within the Western Area. The ISF welcomes the recognition within the strategic context that meaningful, sustainable change in the levels of damage caused to society thought the misuse of alcohol and drugs can only be achieved through collaborative working across the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. The Western Independent Sector Forum is committed to maximizing its role and contribution to tackling the underlying causes of health inequalities and the specific issues relating to alcohol and substance misuse.

Members present were generally supportive of the priorities and outcomes within the framework and acknowledged the time and effort involved in its construction.

Longevity.

Concerns were expressed that many of the outcomes are long-term in nature (and recognising that is only a 4-year framework) achieving them will be challenging in the face of today's culture re alcohol particularly. Concerns were also expressed in relation to skill drift and provider morale as a consequence of lack of organisational certainties.

Joined up commissioning

Members expressed some concerns regarding a perceived lack of co-ordination between strategy sequencing and funding priorities, reference was made to the BIG LOTTERY impact of alcohol, CAWT, LCGs, TYC, fit & well and some confusion was expressed as to “role and responsibilities”.

Cultural sensitivities / Effective alcohol social policy

WISF Members recognized that alcohol use, and indeed prescription medicine misuse is deeply embedded in Northern Ireland Society, the health and economic consequences are well documented in the consultation document.

WISF Members were keen to point out Alcohol-related problems are the result of a complex interplay between individual use of alcohol and the surrounding cultural, economic, physical environment, political and social contexts.

Building on local evidence

WISF Members engaged in a very honest and passionate discussion on the willingness and desire to put the service user at the center of the process and build a respectful, high quality, relevant, socially acceptable provision around the person. A genuine commitment to participate in, learn and share the learning from impact measurement review was articulated. Members felt frustrated by a lack of ability to interrogate data from the IMT, generally it was believed to be a missed opportunity and a tool that could in the future shape and improve commissioned service delivery. Opportunity to learn from and share best practice within the locality and within the region would be welcomed. Some frustration was expressed that commissioners were too keen to import programmes and less willing to create a supportive environment for the development of local evidenced based best practice.

Workforce development / building, assuring and promoting C&V capacity.

WISF members wished to deliver high quality services and demonstrated an intention and commitment to quality frameworks and industry specific high quality training and educational development.

Regulation

WISF expressed frustration at Alcohol advertising and promotion which was believed to be rapidly expanding and is increasingly sophisticated and carefully targeted, including to youth. It was perceived to be aimed at attracting, influencing, and recruit new generations of potential drinkers despite industry codes of self-regulation.

WISF members articulated the need for Effective alcohol social policy that can put into place measures that control the supply of alcohol and/or affect population-wide demand for alcohol. Members had cited research that demonstrate the value of comprehensive policies such as legal measures to: control supply and demand, control access to alcohol (by age,

location and time), and provide education and treatment for those who need assistance, levy taxation to affect prices and to pay for problems generated by consumption, and harm-reduction strategies to limit alcohol-related problems.

Alcohol problems are highly correlated with per capita consumption so that reductions of use can lead to decreases in alcohol problems. Because alcohol is an economic commodity, alcohol beverage sales are sensitive to prices, i.e., as prices increase, demand declines, and visa versa. Price can be influenced through taxation and effective penalties for inappropriate sales and promotion activities. Such policy measures affect even heavy drinkers, and they are particularly effective among young people. Members expressed their frustration at their inability to influence regulation. Whilst DHSSPS cannot affect these directly it should be recognised that acting on alcohol in particular in the absence of policy framework to address these issues will have reduced impact.