

# PRESS BRIEFING



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## Focus on drug harms not just drug arrests, says independent Commission

- **Enforcement has contained illegal drug supply, but more arrests and drug seizures do not always lead to lower availability or fewer problems.**
- **However, some innovative approaches have addressed the most harmful characteristics of entrenched drug markets e.g. violence/intimidation.**
- **New measures of impact are needed so operations are judged on real benefits to communities, not simply arrests and seizures.**

Most illegal drug markets in the UK are entrenched and resilient to traditional enforcement activity, and in some cases arrested dealers are 'replaced' in a matter of hours, the UK Drug Policy Commission reports. This means it cannot be assumed that drug arrests and seizures will always benefit communities. In some cases they have actually made things worse.

However, even where drug markets cannot be eradicated, enforcement agencies have an opportunity to reduce the damage drugs inflict on communities. For instance by:

- Cracking down on particularly harmful behaviours, such as gun violence, sexual exploitation or use of children as lookouts or couriers.
- 'Closing' open (flagrant) markets that can erode community confidence.
- Pushing markets out from particularly damaging places e.g. residential areas.
- Ensuring addicted users and dealers get treatment and support.

Following a year-long review involving national and local enforcement agencies the Commission recommends that:

- Steps are taken to improve understanding of the full scale and nature of the harms caused by drug markets.
- Research is undertaken to show what current enforcement activity works and under what circumstances, and what provides the best value for money.
- New measures are developed which can identify better the impact of drug-related enforcement activity on harms.
- Local pilot schemes are set up to explore new and innovative enforcement approaches to reducing the harms caused by drug markets.

The Commission's findings are reinforced by a survey of over 400 law enforcers where:

- 90% of respondents thought it very unlikely that established UK drug markets will be eradicated in the foreseeable future.
- 80% thought there was an opportunity for enforcement agencies to shape those drug markets that persist to make them less harmful.
- Only 21% of respondents agreed (and only 2% strongly) that current targets for enforcement agencies 'are a good measure of the impact they have on drug related harms'.

Roger Howard, Chief Executive of the UKDPC, said:

*"Drug law enforcement is clearly not limited to the traditional role of arresting as many dealers as possible in anticipation of reducing supply. Drug markets will inevitably remain, and some enforcement agencies are beginning to prioritise their resources and efforts to curb the most harmful aspect of these. But to do this means having a much bigger picture of the harms being created and much better evaluation of the real impact and value for money of enforcement."*

Tim Hollis, Chief Constable of Humberside and ACPO lead on Drugs, said:

*"ACPO values the work undertaken by UKDPC and we were pleased to contribute to their recent paper on enforcement. The Commission clearly appreciates the complex business of policing drugs markets and there are sound ideas included in the paper for the Home Office, the Police Service, SOCA and other partner agencies. Our commitment to Neighbourhood Policing and the Policing Pledge reflects our desire to listen to community concerns and take action that will contribute towards improving the lives of local people. At the same time we are seeking ways to tackle more robustly the higher level drugs markets that cross force boundaries and which are exploited by serious organised criminals. We fully support the UKDPC's desire to build up the evidence base surrounding drugs enforcement and welcome their paper as a positive contribution to that debate."*

David Bolt, Director of Intelligence for the Serious Organised Crime Agency, said:

*"To succeed in reducing the harm caused to the UK by the drugs trade we need an intelligent combination of traditional law enforcement alongside new and innovative approaches. The UKDPC report acknowledges the harm reduction approach which SOCA has pioneered in the way it prioritises operations and identifies targets. There is considerable potential for further harm reduction in extending this approach through effective partnerships which tackle the problem from all angles in a co-ordinated and sustained manner."*

**- ENDS -**

### **Notes to editors**

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- The UK Drug Policy Commission has today published two documents: a policy briefing, **"Moving towards Real Impact Drug Enforcement: Strategy and policy implications"** and a full review report, **"Refocusing Drug-Related Law Enforcement to Address Harms"**. Both are available online at [www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml](http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml).
- The year-long review included desk research and consultations with enforcement agencies to develop a 'Real Impact Drug Enforcement' approach, backed up by case study examples and practical tools.
- The survey of law enforcers is a snapshot of opinions. Responses were not taken from a representative sample but a self-selecting group, so care should be taken when interpreting the results. Over 400 law enforcement personnel responded from a wide range of agencies, ranks and roles. For more information see Annex D of the full review report.
- The Commission launched in April 2007 and is due to run until December 2012. It is an independent, registered charity that provides authoritative, objective analysis of UK drug policies and encourages policy makers to adopt evidence-based drug policies. It is primarily funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.
- The UKDPC has 12 Commissioners who bring together a broad range of expertise from the fields of drug treatment, medical research, policing, public policy and the media. For more information on the UKDPC please visit [www.ukdpc.org.uk](http://www.ukdpc.org.uk).
- For SOCA media enquiries please call 0870 268 8100.
- For ACPO media enquiries please call 020 7084 8949.

**Statistics for context:**

- Over £1bn: estimated cost of enforcing drug laws, excluding wider criminal justice costs. Source: UKDPC.
- £17.6bn: estimated cost of UK drug markets. Source: HM Government.
- £5.3bn: estimated size of UK illicit drug market (using 2003/04 figures). Source: Home Office.
- 89,200: people arrested for drug offences in 2006/07 (England and Wales, excludes cannabis warnings). Source: Ministry of Justice.
- 4,509: kilograms of heroin, crack and cocaine seized in 2007/08 (England and Wales) by the police and HM Revenue and Customs. Source: Home Office.
- £148 million: recovered assets across all organised crime in 2008/09. Source: HM Government.

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