

Moving towards Real Impact Drug Enforcement

Strategy and policy implications

This briefing is aimed at key strategy and policy makers and influencers. It highlights the implications of our review *Refocusing Drug-Related Law Enforcement to Address Harms*. This considered the role of enforcement agencies in the reduction the harms caused by illicit drug use and drug markets and related enforcement activity. The approach was developed for application at all levels of UK enforcement, but is also relevant to international activities. The 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 full review report is available at www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml.

SUMMARY

Until now, reducing the impact of drugs on a community has tended to rely on three main strategies:

1. Reducing the use of drugs (demand reduction, e.g. drug treatment and prevention).
2. Reducing the harms associated with drug use (traditional harm reduction, e.g. needle exchange).
3. Reducing the amount of drugs supplied (supply reduction, e.g. traditional enforcement).

Drug enforcement efforts have traditionally focused on arrests and drug seizures with the aim of reducing supply. However, such efforts often have limited or no sustained impact on supply, because most drug markets are large, resilient and quick to adapt. Enforcement can even have unintended consequences, resulting in an increase in the damage that drug markets inflict on a community (for instance, by triggering a ‘turf war’).

However, because not all drug markets are equally harmful, a fourth strategy is available; a strategy that has potential to deliver real and lasting benefits even where drug markets are entrenched:

4. Reducing the harms associated with the supply of drugs (caused by drug markets and drug control activities).

Enforcement agencies would be expected to have a leading role in delivering this. They have already given some consideration to this approach, particularly following the creation of the Serious Organised Crime Agency with a ‘harm reduction’ remit and the introduction of new local performance measures, based on perceptions of drug problems and confidence in the police.

The challenge now is to develop and exploit fully the opportunity to deliver proven ‘Real Impact Drug Enforcement’ – with drug enforcement activity achieving a reduction in harms to communities. This can be achieved within current enforcement practice by building consideration of harms into all stages of the enforcement process. The published evidence, case studies and examples of current practice identified as part of our review have led us to conclude that the following principles need to be applied:

- Reducing the impact or harms that drug markets have on our communities should be made an explicit overall aim within relevant strategies and organisations.
- Prioritising and planning activities to tackle drug problems should be based on consideration of the full range of relevant drug harms and risks to individuals, families, communities and institutions.
- Problem identification and priority setting at community level should be in collaboration with the community affected.

- All operations aimed at drug markets should, within the planning process, explicitly identify the harms they are concerned with and identify the characteristics of drug markets that are the cause of those harms. It is important to specify clearly the mechanism by which the activity is expected to have an impact on the harms that are being targeted to ensure that appropriate tactics are selected.
- Partnership working is vital to maximise the effectiveness of action to reduce drug market-related harms.

Within our review we have identified three broad (and potentially overlapping) approaches that could be used to deliver a net reduction in harms:

1. Targeting specific individuals or groups identified as being particularly harmful (e.g. using Prolific and other Priority Offender schemes or one-off targeted operations).
2. Targeting areas where drug problems are particularly damaging (e.g. seeking to displace a market to another area, where it will have less impact, or ‘closing’ open markets).
3. Targeting particularly harmful behaviours (e.g. addressing the use of violence and intimidation, or the use of young people as lookouts and couriers).

The potential benefits of the approach outlined above include:

- improved partnership working, by providing a common language and framework for identifying priority objectives;
- the development of better measures of impact, providing a clearer understanding of what works and which interventions are most cost-effective;
- improved communication with communities, giving them a clearer understanding of the impact of enforcement on the things that matter most to them and so building public confidence;
- impetus for new ways of responding to the problem, which could lead to innovative and more effective or efficient responses; and
- above all, a **real impact** on the harms experienced by individuals, communities and society associated with drug use and, particularly, drug markets; this should enable enforcement agencies to deliver against both confidence and perception targets.

There is very little robust evidence on the impact of much drug-related enforcement activity and on the relative cost-effectiveness of different approaches. Therefore, we draw the following conclusions:

- New, harm-focused measures should be used to measure the impact of drug-related enforcement activity. Traditional measures of success, such as seizures and arrests, are of limited value, and even proxy measures for availability, such as price and purity levels, are insufficient.
- The impact on drug harms of all drug enforcement operations should be assessed to demonstrate proven positive impact on communities and to allow for continuous improvements and ensure value for money.
- There is a need to improve understanding of the scale and nature of the full range of drug market harms.
- Research on the impact of different approaches to enforcement on drug-related harms should be undertaken to show what works under what circumstances and what approaches provide the best value for money.
- A series of pilots should be developed to test the approach suggested in this review and to encourage new and innovative approaches to delivering Real Impact Drug Enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

“Although entrenched markets may be difficult to disable, they can be guided by enforcement action so that they do the least possible damage.”

World Drug Report, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2009).

“Harm reduction, rather than quantities of drugs seized or individuals convicted, is a more useful way of prioritising activities to improve the lives of citizens in the UK.”

Extending Our Reach: A Comprehensive Approach to Tackling Serious Organised Crime, HM Government (2009).

This briefing considers the key strategy and policy implications of our review *Refocusing Drug-Related Law Enforcement to Address Harms*. For more information on the scope and methodology of this review, more detailed analysis, practical tools and conclusions, please refer to the main report, which is available at www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml.

This review is the result of analysis of information from many sources and from discussions with a wide range of enforcement personnel working at local, regional and national levels across the UK. One thing that has stood out throughout the project is the, perhaps understandable, incompleteness of knowledge about the key players in the drug markets and how they operate. Nevertheless, it is clear that those involved are adept at thwarting attempts to disrupt their activities, and the financial rewards provide great incentive for them to do so. Robust evidence on the impact of much drug-related enforcement activity and the relative cost-effectiveness of different approaches is also very limited. These factors make the drawing of firm conclusions on appropriate actions challenging.

The aim of the project was to consider whether a focus on the harms resulting from illicit drug use, drug markets and related enforcement activity might result in greater benefits for individuals, communities and society than are currently being achieved. As such the review did not address the drug control framework itself. Some reading this report will believe that legalisation of drugs will solve many of the harms associated with illegal drugs, while others will argue for much stronger law enforcement. The Commission takes a pragmatic view. The available evidence in support of both perspectives is, in many cases, conjectural or non-existent. The law is not immovable, but at this moment in time there appears little political or public appetite to ease enforcement interventions. At the same time, it is important to recognise that within the current control framework there is scope for flexibility in application and approach, which might be used to reduce the overall harms caused by drug markets in a more cost-effective manner.

Enforcement practice is continually evolving and we have sought to support and give added impetus to developments already underway on the ground, rather than attempt to reinvent the wheel. It is also worth noting that ‘enforcement’ is not simply about policing or the application of drug control laws. Many public services, especially at the local level, apply enforcement-related interventions, for example by using civil actions. The approach outlined by the review has relevance to enforcement at all levels within the UK, although most examples come from the policing sphere, where more evidence is available. While the scope of the project has been limited to the UK, the approach taken could equally be applied to international activities.

THE CHALLENGE

Consideration of the evidence relating to the impact of drug-related enforcement has produced the following observations:

- While prohibition plus some enforcement contains drug markets and use, in established markets efforts to further increase impact on availability and use through traditional enforcement approaches may suffer from diminishing returns. Levels of enforcement activity appear to bear no direct relationship to levels of drug use or availability.
- Traditionally, drug enforcement efforts have focused on arrests and seizures, with the aim of reducing supply, but drug markets are large, resilient and quick to adapt. The gaps created are usually filled rapidly, leaving no apparent long-term change in availability. Few enforcement personnel or other experts believe it is possible to eradicate the drug market through enforcement. In our poll of over 400 enforcement personnel, 90 per cent agreed with the statement ‘it is very unlikely that the UK drug market will be eradicated in the foreseeable future’.
- Therefore, arrests and seizures may have limited or no sustained impact on the range of drug-related harms experienced by individuals or communities; criminals may have been brought to justice, but problems in the community may have remained constant.
- Enforcement can sometimes have unintended consequences, and may even lead to an increase in the damage that drug markets inflict on a community; perhaps by triggering a turf war, or by displacing activity to somewhere more problematic, such as a residential area or near a school (see Box A).
- Drug policy in the UK has increasingly focused on reducing ‘harms’, but there has been little discussion about the role of enforcement in this respect, and the extent to which current practices contribute towards this goal is unknown.

BOX A: TYPES OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT

- A large criminal black market, with associated violence and other crime.
- Policy displacement: due to the opportunity costs of the high expenditure on enforcement.
- Geographical displacement: markets shift to new areas or use different supply routes.
- Crime-type displacement: users and user-dealers turn to other types of crime or to more crime if dealing becomes too risky or if they need to raise more money.
- Tactical displacement: dealers develop new ways of dealing or distributing drugs, such as the use of the internet or mobile phones or new techniques of concealment.
- Target displacement: dealers seek to open new markets in different sub-groups of the population if existing markets are hit.
- Substance displacement: new drugs are developed all the time.
- The stigmatisation of people suffering from addiction, which may impede access to treatment and rehabilitation.

Adapted from: *Making drug control ‘fit for purpose’: Building on the UNGASS decade*, UNODC (2008) and *Practice Advice on Analysis*, NPIA (2008)

THE OPPORTUNITY

Our review has indicated that there is clear potential for a more harm-focused approach to drug law enforcement to make a real impact on the harms arising from drug markets.

Until now, attempts to reduce the impacts of drugs on a community have tended to rely on three main strategies:

1. Reducing the use of drugs; both the number of users and the frequency with which they use (demand reduction, e.g. drug treatment and prevention).
2. Reducing the harm associated with drug use (traditional harm reduction, e.g. needle exchange schemes).
3. Reducing the amount of drugs supplied (supply reduction, e.g. traditional enforcement).

Enforcement agencies can contribute to reducing drug harms in all these areas, but they have a leading role in supply reduction. The traditional role of enforcement in containing drugs markets – and in particular in tackling markets that have not yet become established – should not be undervalued, but it does have limitations and is certainly not an unambiguous way of reducing harm.

However, there is an additional approach which provides clear potential for enforcement agencies to make a significant contribution to reducing drug harms. Not all drug markets or drug dealers are equally harmful. For example, some cause more ‘collateral damage’ – such as violence, corruption and sexual exploitation – than others, and the more visible markets cause greater fear of crime and corrode confidence in the authorities and the law. Therefore, if the most harmful characteristics of drug markets are prioritised and addressed, the impacts on communities can be reduced, even where drug markets are entrenched and there is no reduction in the amount of drugs supplied or used. This provides a fourth strategy for reducing drug harms:

4. Reducing the harms associated with supply of drugs (caused by drug markets and drug control activities).

Enforcement agencies might be expected to take a lead role in reducing the damage that remaining drug markets have on our communities (reducing drug market harms), thereby enhancing community confidence. To achieve this, enforcement agencies could:

- dismantle those drug markets that cause the most harm, with the expectation that they will be replaced by less harmful ones;
- tackle the aspects of drug markets that are creating the most harm in order to curtail or change those practices; because drug markets often adapt to enforcement efforts, there is an opportunity to ‘shape’ them into less noxious forms; and
- modify or reduce the use of enforcement activities that potentially increase the damage caused by drug markets; or put interventions in place to mitigate such harms (e.g. following up drug raids with support for children and families of dealers, who may otherwise be at risk).

REAL IMPACT DRUG ENFORCEMENT

To a greater or lesser extent, enforcement agencies in the UK are already adopting a harm-focused approach. For example, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) has a harm reduction remit, and the move to neighbourhood policing and problem-oriented approaches encourages a greater focus on the harms experienced by communities. This approach also resonates with the emphasis in the Policing Green Paper, *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our communities together*, on improving community confidence in the

police, and the introduction of local performance measures based on perceptions of drug problems. The challenge now is to develop and exploit fully this opportunity and to deliver proven ‘Real Impact Drug Enforcement’ – with real benefits to communities from drug enforcement activity.

As part of our review we have identified a range of case studies and examples of current practice. These have led us to conclude that the following principles need to be applied.

A stronger overall focus on harms is required

- **Reducing the impact or harms that drug markets have on our communities should be made an explicit overall aim within relevant strategies and organisations.** This is already becoming evident in many strategies, such as the recently published drug strategies for the different UK administrations, and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland’s drug strategy includes a harm reduction strand. However, in some instances there is a need to incorporate a wider understanding of the harms associated with drug markets, and the approach must be carried through into operational planning and impact assessment.
- **Prioritising and planning of activities to tackle drug problems should be based on a consideration of the full range of relevant drug harms and risks.** This should encompass harms to individuals, families, peers and neighbours and to the wider community and institutions, and should incorporate harms from drug use and markets and from enforcement activity itself. Some harms (e.g. risks to children of drug addicts and dealers) have begun to be more recognised. However, there is a risk that harms that are harder to see or measure (e.g. corruption and intimidation) are not given due consideration while in reality they may be causing some of the greatest problems for communities. As part of our review we used a broad matrix of harms (see Figure 1, at the end of this document), which was found to be a useful tool in joint exercises in problem identification and prioritisation. SOCA has recently published a Harm Framework for Serious Organised Crime similar to this in its 2008/09 annual report, and similar tools and approaches should be adopted by other agencies.
- **Problem identification and priority setting at community level should be in collaboration with the community affected.** The most salient harms will vary from area to area. The Flanagan Review and ensuing Policing Green Paper (for England and Wales) encourage greater engagement with communities, who can provide a better understanding of the characteristics of local drug markets that are causing most concern. Neighbourhood policing PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings could provide an opportunity for this at the local level. Engaging the community through structured, deliberative processes will assist the development of a stronger understanding of the problems caused by drug markets and the options available to alleviate them. Trade-offs will need to be explicitly considered, and the different perspectives that exist within communities should also be explored. However, at regional and national levels the problems and underlying drivers associated with organised crime, such as corruption or money laundering, are not so readily visible and a focus on neighbourhood priorities may distort activity. In this case it may be necessary to adopt alternative, innovative approaches to community engagement, perhaps involving deliberative panels or by including other ‘communities’, such as the business sector and local government.

- **All operations aimed at drug markets should, within their planning process, identify explicitly the harms they are concerned with and identify the characteristics of drug markets that are the cause of those harms. It is important to specify clearly the mechanism by which the activity is expected to have an impact on the harms that are being targeted to ensure that appropriate tactics are selected.** There should also be an understanding of the possible and likely unintended consequences of interventions. Often this will involve difficult decisions, such as trading-off a reduction in some harms against an increase in others (e.g. where a drug market is displaced from one locality to another). Such decisions are made implicitly every day by enforcement agencies up and down the country. However, explicit consideration of trade-offs is likely to improve effectiveness and ensure an overall net reduction in harms.
- **Partnership working is vital to maximise the effectiveness of action to reduce market-related harms.** A shared understanding and agreement of the harms that are being addressed and the role of each agency in the partnership is essential. This can be enhanced through taking a broader view of drug harms and, in particular, by stronger involvement of local government and health services.

A wide range of operational approaches should be considered

While drug supply remains illegal, a level of traditional supply-reduction activity is required to ensure the drugs business remains covert, risky and costly for criminals. Furthermore, supply-reduction methods can make a significant contribution to disrupting newly emerging, immature markets, where supply structures and demand are not fully developed and are therefore more vulnerable. However, to have an impact on harms such methods should be used in conjunction with other approaches. A focus on harms should encourage the development of new ways of responding to drug problems and more effective and efficient responses.

Within our project we have identified three broad approaches that could be used to deliver a net reduction in harms:

4. Targeting specific individuals or groups identified as being particularly harmful.

For example:

- **Identifying drug using offenders and engaging them in treatment.** Many drug using offenders are street dealers and/or undertake large amounts of acquisitive crime to fund their habit, and engaging them in treatment has been shown to reduce their offending. A previous UKDPC review of the evidence (*Reducing Drug Use, Reducing Reoffending*, UKDPC, 2008) concluded that the criminal justice system has an important role to play in reducing drug use and recidivism among offenders. The evidence supports the use of the **Drug Interventions Programme (DIP)** and other schemes that seek to engage offenders with drug treatment. However, examples such as the Derbyshire Drug Market Project show that crackdowns on local markets on their own are unlikely to be effective at getting users to enter treatment, and may in fact have the unintended consequence of discouraging those already engaged in treatment from attending.

- **Proactive engagement** with offenders, such as in the **Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO)** programme and other schemes (e.g. Integrated Offender Management) that seek to manage offender behaviour, may also be an effective way to get drug-using offenders to engage with treatment and rehabilitation services. A number of areas have combined elements of the DIP and PPO schemes and have developed **assertive outreach schemes** (e.g. Operation Reduction in Brighton and Operation Iceberg in Kent), in which street-level dealers (who have been identified through test-purchase operations as user-dealers) are approached and offered the opportunity to enter a programme of treatment and rehabilitation as an alternative to arrest and prosecution. This has proved successful in rehabilitating individuals and reducing their offending, and also reduces the costs associated with arrest, prosecution and incarceration.

Box B: OPERATION GRASSLANDS: TARGETING PARTICULARLY NOXIOUS CRIMINALS

In Wakefield, Operation Grasslands targeted a family that was having a conspicuous and corrosive influence on the community. Dealing by the family members was becoming increasingly blatant, and their conspicuous wealth was damaging public confidence in authority and potentially providing a negative role model for young people in the area. Following a substantial period of intelligence gathering and covert operations, the targeted individuals were successfully prosecuted and their assets seized. Attention was paid to communicating with the residents in the affected neighbourhood through the involvement of neighbourhood policing teams, and also more widely in the local media and through symbolic publicity stunts, such as crushing the dealers' cars.

- **Prioritising individuals or organised crime groups on the basis of the harms they cause.** In the UK, the agencies responsible for dealing with organised crime are all developing mechanisms for ranking groups on the basis of the harms and risks they pose. For example, the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) has recently published a report on a mapping project which found that 95 per cent of the organised crime groups in Scotland are involved in drug crimes; SCDEA has identified the top 20 most harmful groups for specific targeting. Similar approaches are being adopted in other parts of the UK. At the local level, operations may use a variety of means to target groups or individuals deemed to be causing major harms. Operation Grasslands (see Box B) is an example of one such operation. In Liverpool, Operation Macarise also targeted a family of dealers, who in this case were increasingly using violence and intimidation. The operation made extensive use of financial investigations to build the cases against the individuals.
- **Specific deterrence approaches**, such as the well-known Boston Gun project. In this project, rival gangs of youths who were known to be involved in an increasingly violent turf war were told explicitly that if there was any further violence involving their rival gangs then they would be the target for a crackdown using all available legal sanctions, but that if the murders stopped they would not receive any special attention. The result was a dramatic cessation in the violence.

5. **Targeting areas where drug problems are particularly damaging.** For example:

- International evidence suggests that a **variety of measures** can be used to impact on markets in specific areas. These may include: parking a marked police car outside a crack house, so making users reluctant to go in; redesigning spaces or installing CCTV, to inhibit dealing in particular areas; high-visibility policing; intelligence-led investigative work; warning potential buyers; and encouraging community action. However, in most cases the impact of individual actions is hard to sustain and dealing is displaced elsewhere (but if this creates less nuisance, that may be a positive outcome).
- **Multi-agency, multi-component strategies involving the community appear most likely to have a sustainable impact**, but these are resource intensive, particularly early on. Operation Nemesis in Staffordshire (see Box C) is an example of one such operation. Although not formally evaluated, the objectives of the operation were all met, and the value placed on it by the community is shown by the fact that the operation has now been mainstreamed with continued funding from all partners.

Box C: OPERATION NEMESIS: A MULTI-COMPONENT PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO TACKLING A LOCAL MARKET

Operation Nemesis in Staffordshire is an example of one such operation. It targeted an area of Stoke on Trent that had high levels of deprivation and crime, had become a hub for Class A dealing in the Midlands and was associated with increasing levels of violence.

The operation involved a large covert intelligence operation followed by an enforcement phase. However, this was combined with a strong partnership and community engagement process, which included joint training for practitioners within different partner organisations, an environmental clean-up campaign, the funding of additional drug treatment places, crime prevention equipment provision and work with young people in the area. This was all supported by a major media and communication strategy.

The objectives of the operation were all met including: a decrease in reported crime; positive feedback in community forums and surveys; increased calls to Crimestoppers; increased uptake and retention in drug treatment; and a number of successful prosecutions of level 2 and 3 dealers. The operation has now been mainstreamed with continued funding from all partners.

6. **Targeting particularly harmful behaviours**, such as the use of violence and intimidation, or the use of young people as lookouts or couriers. For example:

- The **Sentencing Advisory Panel** has recently identified a number of factors relating to harms associated with drug production, trafficking and dealing offences that it has proposed should be considered as mitigating or aggravating factors for sentencing. These include targeting premises where there are vulnerable people, such as schools, bail hostels or psychiatric or drug treatment facilities, and the use of young people as couriers. Such nuanced recognition of particularly harmful characteristics of drug markets within sentencing is welcome and may serve to disincentivise such behaviours.

- The **use of civil powers** may be effective at reducing drug nuisance, for example enforcement agencies could work with councils or housing trusts to target dealers using social housing. Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) for young people, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Serious Crime Prevention Orders may also have the potential to curtail behaviours that are particularly harmful or displace drug market operations to less harmful places. However, the effectiveness of court-based orders is unclear. For instance, some ASBOs ban known drug dealers from using mobile phones. If this is an effective way of stopping an individual from dealing, then it is quite likely that other dealers without such restrictions will simply take their place. Alternatively, the dealers might continue to deal but without using mobile phones, which risks increasing harms caused by visible street dealing.
- **More effective use of the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002** has the potential to make a significant contribution to reducing the impact of drug markets on communities. The accumulation of illegal income from drug markets by a few individuals can create problems associated with those assets, such as corruption, money laundering and violence. It is possible that consistent application of POCA to individuals operating at the higher levels of organised crime networks could change the nature of drugs markets, so that there is less aggregation of wealth and so less harm. Similarly, the use of POCA to target conspicuous wealth could address the problems that this might cause, such as the undermining of confidence in authority and the law and the erosion of community resilience, as was done in Operation Grasslands (mentioned above). However, there is a concern that POCA is currently not always being applied in such a targeted way, and that numerical targets set by government (the seizure of £250m by 2009/10, double that seized in 2006/07) create a focus on quantity that might reduce the ability of agencies to focus their asset recovery efforts where they might have the most impact.
- Targeting the supply of cutting agents (which can bring additional health harms to users) and educating landlords about the potential risks associated with the use of their properties as cannabis farms and how to guard against such use are other examples where targeting behaviours can potentially reduce harms.

There is a need to ensure that **communication with the public** addresses people's concerns and demonstrates that enforcement strategies deliver results. However, the typical media images of a police 'crackdown' – smashing in doors and making arrests – may have a downside in that they may create a demand for a style of enforcement that is not always the most effective. Care also needs to be taken because what may be reassuring to one group might heighten the concerns of others. More innovative ways to engage the public and reassure people that action is being taken need to be sought; the cases presented above illustrate examples of such approaches.

BOX D: POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF HARM-FOCUSED REAL IMPACT DRUG ENFORCEMENT

The approach outlined above has the potential to:

- improve partnership working, by providing a common language and framework for identifying priority objectives;
- facilitate the development of better measures of impact, providing a clearer understanding of what works and which interventions are most cost-effective;
- help communication with communities, giving them a clearer understanding of the impact of enforcement on the things that matter most to them and so building public confidence;
- provide impetus for new ways of responding to the problem, which could lead to innovative and more effective responses and;
- above all, make a *real impact* on the harms experienced by individuals, communities and society associated with drug use and, particularly, drug markets; this should enable enforcement agencies to deliver against both confidence and perception targets.

New measures of impact should be used

Even weak measures of correct objectives are preferable to strong measures of the wrong goals. The complexity of the issue means that a single measure of success is unlikely to be sufficient, but a range of indicators that reflect real impact on the drug problem have many advantages.

- **New, harm-focused measures should be used to measure the impact of drug-related enforcement activity. Traditional measures of success, such as seizures and arrests, are of limited value;** they are measures of activity, and although appropriate measures for project management purposes, their ability to indicate ‘real world’ reductions in the harms caused by drugs is highly questionable. Even proxy measures for availability, such as price and purity levels, are insufficient, as problems could potentially worsen if drugs become expensive and impure. A focus on such measures incentivises certain enforcement approaches, which may not be the most effective at resolving a community’s problems. This means that enforcement agencies are perhaps not receiving recognition for the full contribution they already make.
- Measuring real outcomes may appear to be more difficult than measuring outputs, such as arrests and seizures, but this does not have to be the case. Other possible measures should be creatively considered, particularly when investigating the impact of operations rather than overall performance management. For instance, an indication that the fear of violence or intimidation has been reduced could be an observational study showing an increase in the number of people using a park that was previously used by drug dealers and users. The move to a national ‘perceptions’ target (measuring the extent to which people perceive ‘using or dealing drugs’ to be a problem in their local area) is an opportunity for local enforcement agencies to prioritise those harms identified by communities as of most concern and to work to reduce these concerns (perceptions).

BOX E: POTENTIAL INFORMATION SOURCES FOR MEASURING IMPACT

- Intelligence – including crime and OCG mapping
- Crimestoppers and other crime reports
- National surveys and data
- Community surveys
- Forensic information
- Partner agency data – use and costs associated with services, etc.
- Crime statistics, criminal justice system statistics and drug/asset seizures
- MOSAIC and other demographic data
- Audits/observations – e.g. environmental
- Community feedback mechanisms (e.g. blogs)
- Private sector partner information (businesses etc.)
- Corruption incidences
- House price data
- Interviews/surveys with criminals, police, victims
- ANPR (automatic number plate recognition)
- Media coverage

Source: consultations with analysts facilitated by NPIA

- For national organisations dealing with middle markets and ‘upstream’ activity, it is perhaps even more challenging to demonstrate real world outcomes. However, with the right intelligence it should be possible to target the criminals posing the greatest threat or causing the most harm (as SCDEA has recently announced it will do). It should also be possible to involve the public in the identification of the criteria on which to base such assessments, which might enhance community support for the activities. Ultimately, it would be appropriate to measure reductions in harmful activities, such as money laundering, corruption, violence/intimidation, gun or people trafficking and prostitution. However, given that such activities can be hard to quantify, measures such as arrests of criminals believed to be involved in the most harmful activities (rather than arrests per se) might provide intermediate proxy indicators.

A considerable increase in robust research and evaluation is needed

Robust evidence on the impact of much drug-related enforcement activity and the relative cost-effectiveness of different approaches is very limited. We therefore reach the following conclusions:

- **The impact on drug harms of all drug enforcement operations should be assessed to demonstrate proven impact on communities and to allow for continuous improvements and value for money.** The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) is soon to publish guidance on using Results Analysis. It will stress the need to involve analysts early when identifying the problem, and to develop a clear understanding of the expected impacts of interventions and the potential unintended consequences. Currently, the long-term impact of operations are rarely measured.

- **There is a need to improve understanding of the scale and nature of the full range of drug market harms.** For instance, harms such as corruption are not always taken into account because they are less visible and are difficult to measure, yet they may in fact represent considerable problems for communities. A strategic overview of UK drug market harms is clearly essential to allow a ‘real impact’ approach to develop and facilitate improved prioritising. A comprehensive map of drug markets would help to identify and disincentivise displacement from one Basic Command Unit to another. As mentioned earlier, SCDEA has recently published results from a recent mapping exercise, which it believes will allow it to prioritise the criminals that are causing the most harm. The Association of Chief Police Officers has also developed a mapping tool, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland is working on one. A Serious Organised Crime review is also being taken forward through the Organised Crime Partnership Board, so there is already considerable work being undertaken in this area. However, it cannot be taken for granted that targeting the most harmful criminals will necessarily reduce real world harms and it will still be necessary to consider the impact on the ground.
- **Research on the impact of different approaches to enforcement on drug-related harms should be undertaken to show what works under what circumstances and what approaches provide best value for money.** At present, the evidence available is limited, which makes decisions on where to invest scarce resources difficult.
- **A series of pilots should be developed to test the approach suggested within this project and to encourage the development of new and innovative approaches to delivering Real Impact Drug Enforcement.** These approaches should explicitly seek to reduce the impact of drug markets on communities, engage with these communities to prioritise their activities and consider a wide spectrum of enforcement responses. They should be independently evaluated and monitored for unintended consequences.

THE DRUG CONTROL FRAMEWORK

Although our review did not specifically look at the current legislative framework, there are likely to be opportunities to align this more closely with an approach that reduces harms to communities.

A recent study examining the effects of decriminalisation of drug possession in Portugal concluded that it had significantly reduced the harms caused by drugs and by the enforcement of criminal sanctions. Similarly, in the UK there is no possession offence for anabolic steroids (on the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs) as it would ‘unnecessarily criminalise a group of people’, although no research has been conducted to identify whether this has reduced harms. Further research should be undertaken to **understand whether different approaches could be taken within a strict drug control framework** to reduce drug harms.

The ABC drug classification system is designed to group drugs according to the aggregated ‘harm’ they cause to society. This has led enforcement activity to focus on Class A drugs. However, **a more sophisticated classification system may be required** that can recognise that two markets for the same class of drug (or for the same drug) can deliver different levels and types of harm. The current limitations of the ABC system led to police concerns about the Class C status of cannabis (up to January 2009) as it was felt that the growth in

cannabis production in the UK (and its links to organised crime) needed to be recognised as a priority for enforcement.

There are likely to be other areas where the legislative framework might be considered out of alignment with an approach that seeks to reduce harms from drug markets. For instance, it is perhaps perverse that growing cannabis for personal use is considered a more serious offence than purchasing the same material from organised crime. A comprehensive **review of unintended consequences of current legislation** would therefore be valuable.

CONCLUDING REMARKS – THE NEED FOR JUSTICE

There is concern among some enforcement personnel about any approach that moves away from simply enforcing the law and bringing people to justice and which appears to ‘allow’ less harmful markets to continue, without automatically arresting perpetrators. However, it is important to note that we are not, in fact, suggesting that no enforcement activity should be undertaken. On the contrary, what we are proposing is that such activity should focus on the most harmful aspects of drug use and markets, and that it should consider the full range of options for addressing these in order to have a lasting positive impact.

Certainly, such an approach may be difficult to sell to the public and politicians unless its benefits are clearly understood and felt on the ground – hence the need for informed public debate, balanced information provision and greater assessment of impact. After some deliberation, most people we have consulted with recognise that this is not ‘going soft’ or ‘defeatist thinking’, but simply being more effective, realising the full potential of enforcement and tackling issues that really matter in a way that is likely to deliver tangible results.

Finite resources mean that enforcement can always only do so much – it is currently the case that not all markets or individual offenders are prioritised or enforced. The benefit of the approach advocated in this report is that it makes such decisions explicit: are we tackling the right markets, and in the right way, to deliver sustainable and real change?

Figure 1: Summary matrix of examples of drug-related harms at different levels

Individual (user or dealer)	Family and peers	Local community	National	International
HEALTH HARMS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical/diseases Mental health Overdose/death Risks from cutting agents Risk of accidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor child welfare Mental/emotional stress More likely to use drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disease transmission Normalisation of drug use and easy access to drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disease transmission Normalisation of drug use and easy access to drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harms caused by crop spraying Risk of death for drug mules Production health risks
SOCIAL/STRUCTURAL HARMS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiralling criminality Impact of Criminal Justice System (CJS) e.g. time in prison Victim of crime/ intimidation Exclusion and vulnerability Loss of support networks Poor life skills Poor/no accommodation Distrust of authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victim of crimes e.g. theft Fear of safety Domestic violence More likely to commit crime Exclusion Family breakdown Poor life chances Negative role model Poor parenting Loss of confidence in authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of crime/anti-social behaviour (ASB) Victim of crime/ASB Attraction or recruitment to criminal life Related crime, e.g. prostitution, gangs, corruption Strain on local services 'No go' areas Local reputation Lack of social cohesion Loss of amenities Corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of crime Increased crime statistics Growth in organised crime Underclass of vulnerable people Lack of social cohesion Corruption Loss of respect for law Loss of confidence in authorities Strain on NHS Overcrowded prisons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict/violence Growth in organised crime Exploitation of vulnerable people Corruption Destabilised communities/governments Loss of respect for law/confidence in authorities
ECONOMIC HARMS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unemployment Poverty/debt Poor prospects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty/debt Loss of breadwinner Cost of being victim of crime Cost of help/support for user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of help/support services Cost of crime Cost of enforcement and the CJS Property devalued Barrier to regeneration Loss of business Increased unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of help/support services and welfare Cost of crime Cost of enforcement/CJS Loss of tax revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of help/support services Cost of crime Cost of enforcement/CJS Loss of tax revenue Dependency on drug revenues stifling economic development/investment
ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degradation of neighbourhoods, e.g. discarded paraphernalia Hazards from illicit production, e.g. labs/farms 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deforestation Chemical waste

