

Breaking the cycle of drugs and crime

Private firm to help stop junkies offending

DRUGS-driven criminals will be given faster access to treatment to beat their addictions as part of a pioneering pilot scheme to stop them re-offending.

Criminals are currently offered rehabilitation when they are arrested, but have to wait up to two weeks for treatment.

Senior police officers are concerned the delay is making addicts turn back to crime to feed their habit as soon as they are released from police custody.

Now, the Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT) is in talks with a private firm to offer same-day treatment at two drop-in centres in Medway and Swale.

New drop-in services at centres in Gillingham and Sittingbourne will help reduce burglary, muggings, car crime and other offences committed by drug addicts, according to Lola Triumph, of the KDAAT.

Contract

"It's about breaking the cycle between crime and drugs, which is distressing for everyone. Crime affects whole communities and if you can break that cycle you are doing a good job.

"The more people we can divert from criminal activity into being responsible members of society, the better for everyone."

She added: "We do need more rapid access into treatment. The addicts need the help almost yesterday."

The KDAAT, which counts the police, the county council and HM Revenues and Customs among its members, is on the verge of signing a contract worth hundreds of thousands of pounds with the London-based firm Drug Treatment Ltd (DTL).

If the plans go ahead, DTL will staff the drop-in centres from next month. They run similar schemes in Staffordshire and the Isle of Wight.

According to its website, its remit is: "To support effective evidence-based specialist treatment services that are attractive and accessible to drug users, while cost effective and transparent for commissioners."

The drop-in treatment would be provided at Kent centres already run by the national drugs and alcohol agency Addaction.

If the pilot scheme proves to be successful



Picture posed by model

NEEDLE: Drug users will be offered fast treatment after they have been arrested

By **JAMIE MCGINNES**

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it could be rolled out across Kent.

Sgt Howard Chandler, Kent Police's drugs liaison officer, said as many as three quarters of criminals were drug users at some time in their lives.

He said there had been a shift in tactics used to tackle drug addicts and dealers, with more emphasis placed on treatment.

"Ten years ago when I was leading tactical teams I was smashing drug dealers' doors down, arresting them and taking them into custody. They they'd be back out and we'd do the same thing the next week.

"I now identify the importance to have more opportunities for people to seek treatment, rather than saying, 'we'll be back next week to smash your door down'."

• See www.kentnews.co.uk for all the latest headlines.

Zero tolerance 'social worker'

CHIEF Constable Mike Fuller pioneered drug treatment schemes in London when he worked for the Metropolitan Police.

He is known to be against the decriminalisation of cannabis because he believes it gives young people a mixed message about drugs.

And when he was serving in Brixton, he reversed Brian Paddick's controversial softly, softly approach to cannabis possession.

While in Hammersmith and Fulham, Mr Fuller came up with a strategy called Turning Point. He instructed sergeants to give leaflets to drug-addicted criminals supplying treatment details.

At first, many of the leaflets were thrown away by officers who complained, "we're not social workers".



ROBUST: Mike Fuller

But as leaflets eventually found their way to the criminals, police noticed a drop in crime and demand for information increased.

Kent's biggest drug problem is heroin. The drug often comes into Kent from London dealers.

But police are determined

crack cocaine will not gain a foothold in the county.

From Mr Fuller's experience in London he knows of the drug's potential to cause crime and social problems.

When he arrived in January 2004, Mr Fuller told KoS: "Crack cocaine is something we need to tackle robustly. The emergence of crack cocaine left unchecked spawns violent crime."

Police increasingly use random night-time searches to catch drug users.

Last Saturday, officers with an ion detection machine and sniffer dogs in Canterbury found 21 out of 350 revellers triggered 'high readings' for handling cocaine.

Two arrests were made for possession of cocaine and cannabis respectively.

Legal threat over Turner centre fiasco

THE LEADER of the county council is considering legal action to claw back some of the millions of pounds lost on the Turner Contemporary debacle.

Ambitious plans for a gallery in the sea at Margate were shelved in February by Cllr Paul Carter after it emerged the price tag had risen from £7 million in 2001 to £50m.

A centre will now be built on land, but Cllr Carter wants to see if he can recover any of the £7m-plus estimated to have been lost through the original plans.

He told Kent on Sunday: "We're going through it with a fine tooth comb, fully aware of the fact it's taxpayers' money. We need to recoup as much of the money as we can."

On Tuesday Cllr Carter pledged to a crowd at the Winter Gardens in Margate the cost of the new gallery would not rise above £15m. And he promised it would be built on time.

Under plans to regenerate the area, the Winter Gardens are to be transformed into one of the best conference and concert venues in the region.

Cllr Carter said: "The gallery project is absolutely secure, but there is far more potential for unlocking regeneration."

"The Winter Gardens are an architectural jewel and deserve a renaissance. We have a superb and interesting coastline backed by the old town. I believe the potential is enormous."

Cllr Sandy Ezekiel, leader of Thanet District Council, said: "We know how important the regeneration of Margate is to the local community and I am sure that they will welcome the ideas being presented to them."

"You only have to look at Margate's Old Town to see the difference that regeneration has made in recent years, which owes much to the prospect of Turner Contemporary."

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