

Response to Question raised in Council on 17th December on Nitrous Oxide and legal highs.

A growing number of councils have been calling for greater powers to be able to tackle the sale of 'legal highs'. The availability of 'legal highs' has been increasing and they are openly available on the streets and also via the internet. The latest figures on the number of deaths related to 'legal highs' shows there were 60 in 2013 compared with 10 in 2009.

It is not illegal to sell a number of these substances and Councils and partners need to find creative solutions to protect their communities. The tools and powers in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 offer a means for councils and the Police to take action and Trading Standards have a role in exploring consumer protection legislation and associated powers.

The Home Office is exploring the introduction of legislation to prohibit the sale of NPS but it is unlikely that there will be the parliamentary time to introduce a bill to achieve this in this session of parliament. Guidance has been produced by the Local Government Association – "A Councillors' Guide to Tackling New Psychoactive Substances".

In Oldham a multi-agency group has been established, chaired by the Head of Community Safety Services. The purpose is to develop a Problem Profile, immediate action to be taken, and a medium-term problem solving plan. This includes a Test Purchase Operation and forensic analysis of the results (by the end of February 2015). The initial meeting took place on Friday, 16 January 2015, and a further meeting is planned for February.

Oldham will use the new anti-social behaviour tools and powers to identify premises involved in the sale of NPS/legal highs and consider closure Orders.

There will be a Borough wide approach with a focus on hot-spot areas identified through the Problem Profile. The current hot-spot area is the Town Centre, particularly the bus station.

1. An Action Plan is being developed focusing on:
2. Enforcement
3. Prevention
4. Intelligence
5. Communication

Members of the group include the Team Leader for the Youth Outreach Team, Police, Community Safety managers, DAAT Strategic Manager, Substance Misuse Services (all ages), and the Youth Offending Service. A local town centre GP (Dr Brian Lewis) has asked to be involved in planning a health/ prevention response, working with the commissioner and linking into the new group.