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PRESS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT REVEALS PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES ACT (PSA) WORKING BUT VULNERABLE GROUPS STILL AFFECTED.

A new survey of the street drug market in the UK by DrugWise the online drug information service, has concluded that the primary aims of the PSA which came into force in May 2016 have been achieved. Firstly to close down retail outlets for so-called 'legal highs' and second to stop the legal cat and mouse game whereby a drug would be banned only for the chemists to render the drug legal once more by slightly changing the formula. However, of the new drugs, synthetic cannabinoids collectively known as spice in particular, have become street drugs alongside heroin and crack causing continuing problems for vulnerable groups including the rough sleeping and homeless communities and those in prison.

Other key findings include:

- Unprecedented purity levels for heroin, cocaine, crack and ecstasy
- Confirmation of the changing nature of drug distribution networks
- Significant non-medical use of prescription and over-the counter drugs

The report *Highways and Buyways: a snapshot of UK drug scenes 2016* interviewed drug treatment workers, police officers, researchers and other experts representing 32 organisations and 13 police constabularies.

Harry Shapiro, DrugWise Director says: “The title of the report reflects the very diverse nature of non-medical and recreational drug use in the UK. Spice as a street drug adds another layer of complexity and is a concern especially as the numbers of those rough sleeping continue to rise. But some of those interviewed thought that once former stocks of head shop spice sold onto the streets were exhausted, the bad reputation earned by spice might see use diminish”.

“Other concerns are the strength of some street drugs which interviewees ascribed mainly to drug gangs competing for customers while fuelling the recent rise in drug-related deaths and also the huge amount of opiate painkillers and tranquillisers in circulation both from legitimate medical and illicit sources. All of which underlines the need to retain investment in drug treatment and mental

health capacity allowing the creation of new services to meet the challenges of an ever-changing drug market”.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

- To receive a copy of the embargoed report and for media enquiries, please email Harry Shapiro at harry@drugwise.org.uk or phone 07712529936;
- The report was written by Harry Shapiro and Max Daly, author of *Narcomania*
- DrugWise is an independent online drug information service whose mission is to promote evidence-based information on drugs, alcohol and tobacco.
- In December 2016, so-called 'third generation' synthetic cannabinoids including compounds collectively known as spice, were controlled as Class B drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act.