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Local action What can be done?

Drug supply is not just an international issue, it is the concern of police forces and other members of Drug Action Teams, but what should their objectives be?

The objectives and criteria for success of local action against drug supply are not clear.

They are difficult to clearly articulate and communicate. There seems no agreement, or even a common language, about local supply issues across the UK. It is an urgent problem.

All enforcement managers and DAT members know that an overarching objective of the UK drug strategy is reduction of availability. But how to translate this into a measurement system is another matter.

Availability has *something* to do with physical supply of a drug but what, exactly?

Drug Action Team (DAT) members all over the country have pointed out that setting 'targets' for local availability is difficult when it is not clear what aspects are to be taken into account.

What follows should be considered as ideas for further discussion.

Somerset scene

Some possible criteria for enforcement action against local drug supply were developed during an informal brainstorming session involving staff of Avon & Somerset Police, the regional National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) office, regional HM Customs and Excise staff, the DAT and DrugScope staff.

The Avon and Somerset Police area is largely rural, so the ideas need to be compared with experiences from more urban/metropolitan areas, and other parts of the UK.

With this in mind, criteria for success against local drug supply could include:

- seizures, although they are not on their own a satisfactory measure of performance or outcome for local people

- criminal prosecutions are possibly more relevant, particularly arrest and successful prosecution of 'known dealers' is seen as a valid result

- community satisfaction, however measured, is a valid indicator of success in anti-supply work

- dealer-free zones are important to their residents (even slight use reduction or users having to go 'next door' to buy) – the criteria would be no dealers in certain areas

- displacement objectives and criteria need to be developed that distinguish between no displacement, acceptable displacement, and unacceptable displacement

- civil confiscation is a potentially important local approach. It offers a means to remove bad examples of obviously successful dealers, who act to recruit people into trafficking at local and subsequently higher levels of the market. Criteria might be the numbers and financial yield of civil

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a monopoly or an open competitive market (produced by some aspects of policing). A monopoly would be stable, with few competition problems such as violence, it's good for intelligence gathering, but has the danger of community dissatisfaction at perceived police inactivity or collusion.

Price and purity do not seem important in local supply. Consumers are often willing to pay more for the convenience and safety of a local, known dealer – rather than spend more time travelling to an area with possibly increased risks to maybe get adulterated goods. Many consumers are short-term planners, organising a group purchase on a Friday night.

Upstream – downstream

There are further questions on upstream links – from local supply to the middle market and importation.

There are no criteria for local success on small, one-person or amateur importation, for example a dealer going to Amsterdam to supply a local market back home. Nor on the lower to middle level of longer trafficking chains (distribution of a 50 kilo importation).

To disrupt the flows of drugs coming into force areas 'cross-border' policing can mean working with neighbouring forces/regions, but it can also involve working with forces/regions across the UK. This has implications for development of criteria of cost and effectiveness on national work by local police forces.

The transit of drugs through an area may have no local significance but does involve local resources. Measures of local success may need to acknowledge this.

On the wider task of preventing organised crime there is a need to acknowledge the work of local enforcement staff who reduce the extent to which novice local dealers may later develop serious national criminal organisations.

In autumn 2000 the Supply Side Research Board (SSRB), which steers UK research on supply and enforcements aspects of the strategy, agreed a proposal from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) for preliminary work to clarify these issues ■

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confiscations per annum, but people would need to know that police and courts were not just lightly taxing dealers but were eliminating them financially.

- market separation (creating and maintaining a big distance between retail sale of class-A drugs and, say, cannabis) is a possible criterion, since the strategy is particularly orientated to reducing supply/availability, access and use of class-A drugs.

- civil/administrative routes, for example in housing policies, are

seen to be potentially valuable.

We need to know more about the effects on supply

- criteria are required to distinguish supply reduction from nuisance reduction (nice to have both, but they don't always go together)

- measures are needed for the 'un-seen deterrent' of everyday policing in the community and customs.

Unclear areas

It is unclear if it should be an objective for supply to be either