



# East Belfast

## “The new normal”

Feedback from a series of community conversations discussing drugs and alcohol issues in East Belfast

Facilitated by

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) supports the development of a confident coordinated community sector in East Belfast.

EBCDA is the 'umbrella organisation' supporting community development in East Belfast. Our membership is made up of community groups drawn from an area that contains almost 109,000 people. EBCDA's job is to add value to the activity undertaken by these groups. We work with other key organisations to ensure the continued development of a community sector in East Belfast that is recognised, valued and effective.

In February and March 2017 East Belfast Community Development Agency and East Belfast Drug and Alcohol Stakeholder Forum organised a series of community conversation/listening events to establish what the "new normal" is for neighbourhoods in East Belfast in terms of drug and alcohol use and the issues that arise from it.

In addition to the facilitated events, there was also provision made for community and voluntary sector groupings that were unable to attend the organized sessions to contribute to the process through the completion of an online survey.

The process consisted of participants, either in a group setting or those completing the online survey, discussing or feeding back on the same set of three questions.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

East Belfast Drug and Alcohol Stakeholder Forum came into existence following a workshop process in 2013. This was a response to local concern about the impact of drugs and alcohol, and awareness of support services. It is a multi-agency forum facilitated by EBCDA and is attended by community groups, voluntary agencies, service providers and statutory organisations with an interest in drug and alcohol-related issues.

Forum members have been increasingly concerned by the rise and impact of drug and alcohol misuse on all sections of community life within East Belfast and supported by funding from the PCSP have commissioned this community listening exercise at a grass roots level to develop a greater understanding of community experiences and views.

### **3.0 PURPOSE**

Supported by funding from East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership (DPCSP), EBCDA and the forum commissioned this community listening exercise at a grass roots level to develop a greater understanding of community experiences and views.

In February and March 2017 East Belfast Community Development Agency and East Belfast Drug and Alcohol Stakeholder Forum organised a series of community conversation events to establish what the "new normal" is for neighbourhoods in East Belfast in terms of drug and alcohol use and the issues that arise as a result.

The "New Normal" process had the following outcomes:

Develop a greater understanding of current trends in drugs and alcohol use;

Develop greater understanding of how current use is impacting on crime and anti-social behaviour;

Develop greater community confidence and representation at Drug and Alcohol Stakeholder Forum.

The facilitators hosted ten events in total:

3 x Inner East Belfast focused events

3 x Outer East Belfast focused events

3 x thematic listening events

1 x feedback event to the East Belfast Drug and Alcohol Stakeholder Forum

In addition to the facilitated events, there was also provision made for community and voluntary sector groupings that were unable to attend the organized sessions to contribute to the process through the completion of an online survey. In total over twenty-five community groups engaged in the process.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The Methodology for the research included the collation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Stakeholder's views were sought at all levels, including representatives from a range of community and voluntary sector organisations, as well as representatives from EBCDA and Policing & Community Safety Partnership. Mr Cyril Moorhead, reported to Mr J Currie - EBCDA, at the start of the contract and he further discussed and refined the proposed approach, structure and methodology outlined in the tender at same. During the meeting details were discussed and provided of those who should be invited to participate in the research process, over and above those whom CRM Associates had already identified, given that many of the organisations and individuals were familiar to Cyril given his previous work in the area.

**Structured Face to Face Interviews**-Interviews were held with EBCDA – Staff and Policing & Community Safety Partnership representatives as well as other statutory, voluntary and community stakeholders. The interviews considered issues relevant to them, evidence to support this, areas for consideration and development; future developments and opportunities and challenges and constraints – solutions identified.

**Focus Groups**- Focus groups were held, the purpose of the Focus Groups was to explain the purpose of the research; consider development or support required, where there are areas for further development and constraints, barriers and challenges- and how these may be resolved.

**Analysis and Review**- This aspect of the work involved the collation of material from the above and a review, appraisal and validation of the data presented. The material from the desk research, interviews and focus groups were structured around the project objectives highlighted in the terms of reference in order to meet the requirements of EBCDA.

## 5.0 COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

- Difficult and emotive process for many of the participants.
- Feelings of anger, frustration, abandonment and disempowerment within communities. “ our communities are being left to the hands of the drug dealers, no one seems to care”
- Perception that services not being delivered in a cohesive, coordinated and effective way.
- Community confidence in the PSNI and their ability to combat community issues is very low. “ we are fed up reporting the drug dealers to the police, nothing ever seems to get done about it”, “ the PSNI don’t seem to be able to tackle underage drinking and anti social behaviour in our area, people are getting tortured”
- Alcohol and drug issues and concerns are a very high community priority throughout East Belfast. “ our communities are being destroyed by drugs and drink and the problems that they cause with crime and anti social behaviour”

## 6.0 DRUGS ISSUES

- Drugs widely available throughout East Belfast. “you can watch the drug dealers doing deals along the walkway most days”
- Drugs are being distributed throughout all communities in East Belfast by drug gangs with the perception being they are working for or being protected by Paramilitaries. “The boys could stop the drug dealing in our areas if they wanted to”
- Reports of drugs openly being taken in Public houses/clubs in East Belfast. “ Young people can go into most pubs in East Belfast and get drugs”
- Cannabis widely taken by all age groups including schoolchildren. Seen as normal. “Young people don’t see anything wrong with cannabis sure it is legal in a lot of countries”
- Rise in drug debts, people getting drugs on tick. Leading to increase in crime, family stress, and poor mental health.
- Cocaine usage among the over 35’s an issue, and among young men.

## 7.0 ALCOHOL ISSUES

- Younger people underage drinking is widespread. Younger people are drinking more often and harder alcohol sooner. “ We would drink a load of vodka shots before we go out, we start drinking from about 7pm and head to the bar about 11pm”
- Perception that parents are aware of young people drinking alcohol and turn a blind eye to it. “My Ma says that as least she knows where we are when we are drinking upstairs”
- Certain licensed premises in East Belfast are a magnet for Young People at the weekend. Leading to serious disruption and anti social behaviour for the community in that area.
- Increase in drinking in the home which has impacts on family life, domestic violence and children's education.
- No deterrent for young people to stop them drinking, authorities seen as ineffective.
- Older men drinking more due to loneliness, social company.



## **8.0 COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- More resources for community based initiatives building capacity and empowerment within communities.
- More family support type services (expanding Sure Start to include all neighbourhoods within East Belfast)
- More creative and innovative engagement by service providers.
- PSNI to be more proactive in tackling drug pushers and gangs, and be more visible in dealing with underage drinking.
- Improved coordination and better use of resources by statutory agencies.
- More flexibility in how services are delivered.
- Reduce waiting list for people wanting help.

Appendix: Samples of workshop notes

Men - Crime, Realms, Lack of Education  
Social Location, Lack of Coping Skills  
Peer Pressure, Offered Drugs By Peers  
Acceptance of Cannabis Use By Young P.  
+ BY THEIR PARENTS  
(GATEWAY DRUG)

Women - Boredom, Peer Pressure, Acceptance of  
Drugs, Encouraged to Deal to Pay of  
Family Problems - Parents' Future Tension  
or Home  
Impact of Parental Alcohol & Drug Use  
Cycle of Problems - Children Allowed to  
At Night, Neglect Education  
Where Do Teenagers Get The Money  
To Purchase Alcohol & Drugs?

- ABDICATING RESPONSIBILITIES  
"AT LEAST CHILDREN MUST TAKE ALCOHOL & C  
IF THEY ARE SMOKE CANNABIS IN THE HOUSE  
WE KNOW WHERE THEY ARE  
Lack of Parental Discipline  
TEENAGERS NOT RESPECTFUL OF PARENTS & TEA

social

QUESTION 1  
Mental Health +10  
Young People Using Alcohol

Resultant Problems - Families, Crime, etc.  
Consuming Strong Alcohol

Drug Dealing Open/Visible  
Adults  
Acceptance of Drug Use Among Young

Community Acceptance of Drug Use & Peer  
Families Paying off Children's Drug Debts

Boundaries - Responsibilities, Consequences  
Effective Parenting

Local Adults Rx Drugs  
Family Issues - Domestic Violence, Child Abuse  
Young Mothers No Care

"Legal Highs" Selling Rx Drugs

# YF QUESTION 1

- \* Access to ~~the~~ <sup>Caribous</sup> is seen as no big deal
  - Police focussing on 'worse' Drugs
  - YP can buy it easily

\* Coke is on every bar to surface

- 8/9 bars in east Coke is
- Slightly harder to get
- teenage boys, becoming a

\* E/s, meth, the group of people using it

- \* Normal Sat night out
  - Pre-drink 6pm (vodka, shots)
  - Bar 10+ already whiped