

Minister Catherine Byrne
Dept. of Health
Block 1
Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

16th July 2018

cc. Jim Walsh, Drugs and Social Inclusion Policy Unit

Dear Minister Byrne

We very much welcome the Statements in the Dáil on the National Drugs Strategy on 28th June which were facilitated by you as Minister and the Drug Policy Unit in your Department. It was a useful and informative session and in particular, it was very positive to hear the support expressed across all parties and groupings for the health-led approach as set out by the government in the NDS.

The need for significant additional funding to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces and to the community-based projects that they support was also raised by all of the contributors from every party and grouping and we welcome the reference in your own statement to the many worthwhile community projects seeking funding. As Minister, you are aware of the crucial work being carried out by the Community Drug Projects who work across a whole range of services - providing treatment, rehabilitation, recovery, harm reduction, stabilisation, after care, alcohol services, counselling, therapies, childcare, family support, young people's programmes, education, community awareness, community policing – and the work of the Drug Projects makes a major contribution to the implementation of many of the actions set out in the NDS .

Attached, as an example, is an initial report drawn up by Citywide for a recent meeting we held with Community Drug Projects from across the country on their experience in addressing the issues of benzos and tablet misuse, and also in a more limited number of areas, the issue of crack cocaine. The report shows how the Projects innovate and adapt in order to respond to every kind of drug use that comes to their door and to the range of related issues that people present with e.g. intimidation, homelessness, mental health problems etc.

You will be aware from the many visits you have made to these projects of the struggles they face on a daily basis to continue doing this work, in particular in light of the seven years of funding cuts they experienced from 2008 to 2014. In this context, it is essential that the additional 710,000 euro allocated to the Task Forces, as outlined in your Statement in the Dáil, can be accessed as quickly as possible, based on the priorities identified and agreed through the Task Force interagency partnership process and the collective Task Force plan.

The allocation of this money is a first step in the restoration of resources lost to the Task Forces and to the Community Drug Projects and we will be advocating strongly that it is followed by further and greater investment in our local and regional services. If, as we hope, the Working Group on Alternative Approaches recommends a change in our laws as part of the implementation of a health-led approach, we know that the evidence is clear and incontestable that this change must go hand in hand with a very significant increase in investment in our drug services over the coming years.

Yours sincerely

Anna Quigley

Co-ordinator