

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

29 Whitworth Road, Dublin 9, D09 E5C9

3rd July 2019

Cc Jim Walsh, Drugs and Social Inclusion Policy Unit

Dear Minister

RE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY

Following the launch of *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery* in July 2017 Citywide wrote to Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on behalf of the community representatives welcoming his restatement of the government commitment that partnership would continue to be the cornerstone of the Strategy. In particular, we welcomed his comment that the Strategy “recognises the importance of supporting the participation of communities in key decision-making structures, so that their experience and knowledge informs the development of solutions to solve problems related to substance misuse in their areas.”

What was crucially important for us in that statement was the reference to “decision making” structures. We noted that for a number of years prior to 2017 we had been pointing out that key policy proposals were no longer being brought to the NDS interagency structures but were being decided instead within the confines of specific government departments and agencies. This had brought us back to the situation that preceded the setting up of NDS structures, with a lack of cohesion and integration in our approach to the drugs issue, and ultimately this leads to policy decisions in one department or agency that are incompatible or contradictory with those of another.

We emphasised the need for the new structures set out in RHSR to work effectively as key decision-making structures in the implementation of the NDS at local, regional and national level and the Taoiseach in his response assured us of his department’s support for this approach. Since the NOC and SSc were established we have attended and participated fully in all of the meetings as representatives of the Community Sector. We have contributed to all discussions and raised the issues that concern us at the meetings and we have also written to you as Minister about specific key issues on a number of occasions.

Unfortunately, we are now seriously concerned that the key principles of interagency partnership and community involvement in decision-making are not being implemented in practice on the NDS structures. As part of our designated role in the Strategy we have a responsibility to reflect the experience of our Community Reps and Community Projects on the ground and also to look at what steps can be taken to try and support the implementation of the Strategy in line with the principles that it sets out. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you as a matter of urgency to discuss how we can move forward together in addressing our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Anna Quigley
Fergus McCabe
National Community Representatives, NDS