

Minister Catherine Byrne
Dept. of Health
Miesian Plaza, 50-58 Baggot St.
Dublin D02 XW14
cc. Jim Walsh, Principal Officer DPU

30th January 2019

Dear Minister

Following the recent National Oversight Committee (NOC) meeting on January 18th, we are writing to you to follow up on issues raised by Fergus McCabe on behalf of the Community Sector.

One of the key requirements in the development of the current NDS was to put in place national structures that would ensure the effective implementation of the NDS and the interagency partnership approach that underlies it. Our experience to date as members of the national structures, the NOC and the Standing Sub-committee (SSc), is that they have not been effective in carrying out the roles assigned to them in the NDS.

The role of the NOC is to give leadership, direction, prioritisation and mobilisation of resources to support the implementation of the Strategy, yet it does not have access to even the basic information that is required to carry out this role. A striking example of this was around the allocation of the increased funding for drug-related initiatives in 2018. The allocation was not presented by the Dept or by the HSE for discussion at the NOC in advance of decisions being made or in advance of the information on allocations becoming publicly available. As members of the NOC, we found out about the detail of the allocations through answers given to parliamentary questions. We also wrote to you previously about the lack of consultation in developing the agenda for the National Drugs Forum and we believe the NOC should have had a clear role to play in planning and identifying priority issues to be addressed at the Forum, as it should have in relation to future Fora.

In relation to the 2018 progress report on NDS actions circulated at the January meeting, in our view the information provided is wholly inadequate to enable the NOC to carry out a considered assessment of progress in 2018. The SSc, as the Committee charged with driving implementation, has a key role to play in preparing ongoing progress reports for the NOC, but it is not in a position to provide these reports as it is not receiving the required information either. It should also be noted that the SSc did not meet between June and November 2018.

It is essential that the NOC receives an adequate and appropriate briefing on progress in implementing NDS actions and we were heartened by your support at the meeting for a more in-depth consideration of the 2018 progress report to take place. We are now calling for a full day meeting of NOC to be organised promptly, where the Committee will receive and consider presentations from the lead agencies on their respective actions, how they have prioritized them and how they are engaging with partner agencies and sectors in relation to implementation. We believe that such a meeting is an essential step in ensuring that the NOC carries out its role more effectively during 2019.

Yours sincerely

Fergus McCabe, Anna Quigley

National Community Representatives