



# The Drugs Crisis in Local Communities

Political Parties Responses

May 2004

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## The Drugs Crisis in Local Communities - How the Political Parties Respond

Citywide contacted all political parties represented in the Dail, to ask them to outline their party position in relation to the outstanding commitments in the National Drug Strategy and to indicate what commitments their parties can give in relation to the Drug Crisis, which continues to devastate our communities. We have produced the responses as we received them; the Progressive Democrats were the only party not to respond. Citywide is not promoting any one party position in this newsletter, we are merely providing an opportunity for readers to be informed of how political parties propose to deal with the Drugs Crisis.

The following commitments were given in the National Drugs Strategy 2001 - 2008 and have not been met:

### Treatment

• Action 48

To have in place, in each Health Board area, a range of treatment and rehabilitation options as part of a planned programme of progression for each drug misuser, by end 2002.

• Action 51

To have a clearly co-ordinated and well-publicised plan in place for each Health Board area by end 2002 for the provision of a comprehensive and locally accessible range of treatments for drug misusers.

• Action 55.

To explore immediately the scope for introducing greater provision of alternative medical and non-medical treatment types, which allow greater flexibility and choice.

### Action on cocaine.

Since the publication of the National Drugs Strategy, the increasing use and availability of cocaine and the need for services to respond to this has also become a big issue in our communities.

### Policing

• Action 7.

To increase the level of Garda resources in LDTF areas by end 2001, building on lessons emanating from the Community Policing Forum model.

• Action 10.

To continue to target dealers at local level by making additional resources available to existing drug units and for the establishment of similar units in areas where they do not currently exist.

### Young people

• Action 49.

To develop a protocol for the treatment of under 18 year olds presenting with serious drug problems, a Working Group to be established to develop this protocol and to report by mid 2002.

• Action 51.

To have a clearly co-ordinated and well-publicised plan in place for each Health Board area by end 2002 for the provision of a comprehensive and locally accessible range of treatment for drug misusers, particularly for young people.

• Action 59.

To secure easy access to counselling services for young people seeking assistance with drug related problems.

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## Fianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil recognises the seriousness of the drugs problem in Irish society and fully supports the Government's National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008: Building on Experience, which brings together all elements of drugs policy in a single comprehensive and cohesive framework.

We also welcome the Government's allocation of significant resources towards the drugs initiative to date, with over €62 million having already been provided to implement projects established via the local drugs task forces with a further €68 million also having been allocated to date in supporting over 350 facility and service projects.

We also endorse the Government's ongoing and sustained commitment to addressing the drugs problem as a matter of priority with a significant increase of 5% in the moneys available for drugs and young people's facilities and services fund in 2004 from €32 million to €33.5 million and the establishment of the regional drug task forces in the health board areas earlier this year.

In relation to the cocaine problem, Fianna Fáil endorses the view of the Minister of State, Mr Noel Ahern, TD, that the problem of cocaine use can be addressed through implementing the 100 actions in the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 and through projects and initiatives operated through the local drugs task forces and the young people's facilities and services fund. These projects deal with supply reduction, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for a range of drugs including cocaine.

Seán Dorgan, General Secretary

**Use  
your  
Vote**

**on June  
11th**

**Local and  
European  
Elections**

Note: We have only reproduced Party positions, although the following TD's and Councillors have written expressing support for the implementation National Drugs Strategy: Rat Rabbitte TD, Leader of the Labour Party; Gay Mitchell TD, Fine Gael; Councillor Dermot Lacey, Labour; and Councillor Nicky Keogh, Sinn Fein.

## Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein shares your concerns about the effectiveness of the National Drug Strategy and the growing cocaine problem in Dublin. Below I have listed some of the party's primary concerns and action proposals for tackling general drugs issues.

At our recent ard fheis the party committed itself to initiating discussion and debate culminating in a policy conference on updating our drugs policy to the new challenges facing communities dealing with these problems. The policy development process will begin after the June elections.

Sinn Fein proposes:

- Additional funding to the Drugs Task Forces. The current allocation is clearly inadequate to deal with the scale of projects needed to tackle the problem.
- Drug prevention in schools and among young people has to be stressed more and seen as a priority.
- New strategies for dealing with cocaine and crack cocaine addiction have to be formulated, funded and implemented. We need increased funding for community based projects using international best practice.
- Tackling disadvantage needs to be made a priority as the drug problem in many areas can only be tackled in the context of eliminating poverty, improving housing, providing innovative educational and employment strategies. Additional resources are needed in these areas.
- Sinn Fein believes that Garda drugs squads need more resourcing within the policing budget. There also needs to be accountability and community involvement in how those resources are directed. This should happen at Garda Divisional area rather than on local authority basis as this would make a greater impact on the ground in communities.
- There is also a need for properly planned treatment programmes that move beyond methadone maintenance for addicts.
- We need to address the positive role that CE schemes can play both for drug addicts and the schemes, services and projects that can be run by local communities. The focus of such schemes should be dual ones, which provide not just training for employment but equally importantly for much needed service provision and support at the local level.
- There should be greater recognition of the role extended families especially grandparents play in providing parenting for the children of addicts and we support extending fostering allowances to grandparents raising the children of addicts.
- We need the provision of residential care that can accommodate women with children to receive addiction treatment.
- The failure of the judiciary to impose mandatory sentences needs to be addressed.

**Robbie Smith**, ard runai Sinn Fein

## Socialist Party

The Socialist Party believes that Government action to deal with the drug crisis in Dublin happened because of the mass movement of democratic people power in the communities in the mid 1990's. We commend the work of community activists but believe that a new movement of people power will be necessary to keep pressure on Government to fulfil commitments.

1. The Socialist Party and its public representatives will do all in our power to ensure:
2. Real education about the dangers of abuse of all drugs
3. Investment to provide the appropriate treatment for all addicts who require it, including counsellors and back up for the families
4. Tackle the causes of the drug crisis - investment to provide for social, housing and employment needs of the communities left behind by the Celtic Tiger

**Kevin McLoughlin**, National Organiser of the Socialist Party.

## The Green Party

In regard to the issues raised by Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign, the Green Party proposes the following:

### Treatment

- Action 48

Increased funding to ensure that a range of and rehabilitation options are available for drug misuses.

- Action 51

Greater staff and financial resources to ensure that a plan is put in place for each health board area.

- Action 55

Greater funding for NGO's and Charities to enable greater provision of alternative medical and non-medical treatment types.

Increased information availability in schools and third level colleges and in the work place on cocaine use.

### Policing

- Action 7

Increased recruitment of the Garda Siochana and greater training on drug related issues. Increased foot patrols and bicycle patrols in specific areas.

- Action 10

Ensuring that a specific amount of new recruits to the Garda are placed with existing drug units.

### Young People

- Action 49

Immediately establish the Working Group for dealing with under 18 year olds.

- Action 51

Increase staffing and funding to ensure that a comprehensive range of local treatments are available for drug misusers

- Action 59

Increase of Counsellors for young people.

In conclusion the Green Party believes that the emphasis in drug treatment and prevention must be on reduction.

Ciaran Cuffe TD Green Party

## The Labour Party

In the run-up to elections, it is Labour Party practice to provide a central response to queries of this kind on behalf of all our candidates. The Labour Party has a strong stance on drug use in general, and on cocaine in particular.

On the issue of combating drug abuse, our party position is to continue strong criminal justice measures to reduce the supply of drugs, to develop comprehensive educational and community-based measures in order to work toward demand reduction; and to guarantee services for the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts as an integral part of the post-conviction criminal justice process, or as an alternative to prison under the drug court scheme.

We have been active in the Dail on the matter of cocaine specifically, and have pressed the Ministers for Health as well as Community Affairs on this issue. We have stressed the need for projects to address addiction patterns based on poly-drug usage and have underlined the need to increase the number of methadone treatment places nationally.

We have re-iterated our support for the independent evaluation of the National Drugs Strategy at the end of this year and to this end your suggestions are most useful. We will support your aims of providing, with the various Health Boards, clearly coordinated policies of treatment and rehabilitative options which must be locally accessible.

There is a definite need to increase the number of Gardai on a community policing model, and the Labour Party wholeheartedly supports this. This is one of the many areas where the Government has reneged on pre-election promises, and one which we have emphasized repeatedly, and will continue to do so.

Dr Colm O'Reardon, Policy Advisor, Office of the Party Leader, Labour Party

**Treatment**

- Fine Gael as the main opposition party, has continuously lobbied that the Government would fulfill its commitment to implement the National Drugs Strategy in full.
- Fine Gael believes and supports the concept that each drug misuser should have a treatment plan in place, which aims to allow them to progress and assist their recovery and rehabilitation. We also believe that, where possible, each drug misuser should have one lead healthcare professional attached to their case, whether community nurse, outreach worker, social worker or drug worker, which ever is deemed most appropriate in each case. This professional would work both as a mentor and a mediator, working on their client's behalf to ensure that drug misusers can more easily access all the necessary healthcare and social services they require.
- Fine Gael is committed to providing alternative treatment options to those who wish to avail of it. Particularly, for heroin addiction, we are not satisfied with the current government's approach that methadone maintenance presents the "final solution" for heroin misusers. We believe that drug misusers must be given broader treatment options. For those who are on methadone and wish to reduce their dosage or stop completely, their medical progress must be assessed at regular intervals and this must be considered if they wish to reduce or end methadone treatment.
- Fine Gael is fully aware of the growing problem, which cocaine is beginning to present right across Ireland. We have persistently raised this issue in the Dail. We are disappointed by the fact that, despite numerous surveys and studies highlighting the growing problem of cocaine abuse and its huge potential to reach epidemic proportions, that the current FF-PD Government do not prioritise it as a significant threat.
- Fine Gael recognises that cocaine addiction requires distinct treatment options, particularly increased counselling and psychological services. Treatment for cocaine does not feature prominently in the National Drugs Strategy 2001 - 2008. We believe that the review of the National Drugs Strategy, which is currently underway must recommend that the Strategy is adapted to provide increased resources and services to tackle cocaine abuse.

**Policing**

- Fine Gael is committed to providing the 2,000 extra Gardai, which were promised by the current FF-PD Government and have not been delivered upon.
- We are supportive of Community Policing initiatives and we are conscious of the fact that if the promise of 2,000 extra Gardai had been fulfilled by the government, increased community policing could have been implemented on the ground.
- We have called for greater consultation between communities and our police force, by allowing local authority representatives, i.e. councillors, to act as a go-between the community and the Gardai. Local representatives would meet the Garda representatives on a regular basis to discuss policing issues and would raise the concerns of local communities on their behalf.
- We believe that all district Gardai units must draw-up and implement an Alcohol and Drug Policing Plan for their respective areas. This will involve full consultation with each community and members of each Drugs Task Force with the aim of creating individual policing strategies, which meet the differing needs of each area.

**Young People**

- Fine Gael is conscious that young people under 18 have different treatment needs from older, adult drug misusers. We are extremely concerned that the Working Group examining this issue has not yet reported. We have consistently called on Minister Ahern to ensure that this Group would report at the earliest possible date and that the Government would then provide sufficient funding to allow the Group's recommendations to be implemented.
- There is a need for an increased focus within our health service in providing an expanded range of counseling and psychological services to young people, particularly those with drug misuse problems.
- Spending on our mental health services has halved from 12% in 1997 to 6% in 2003. We do not believe that this position is acceptable. We are particularly conscious of the fact there is a serious gap in Irish psychiatric services for adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18. Over the age of 16 services are provided by adult psychiatric services, which are not resourced to deal with adolescents. This must be changed - with suitable intervention mental services available for young adolescents, particularly those with addiction problems.

**Other Fine Gael Initiatives on Drugs**

We also propose to:

- Ring fence all monies seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau for drug treatment and divisionary community projects to help drug addicts and those vulnerable to drug abuse to avoid drug dependency. We believe that the communities, which have suffered the most as a result of the activities of criminal gangs, should be the first to benefit from their seized assets.
- Expand outreach services to specifically target hard-to-reach injecting drug users, such as mothers, the young and the homeless, with a concerted effort to get drug abusers to engage in regular drug services. This will involve increasing both the number and resources available to the outreach service.
- Create a new national alcohol strategy and merge this strategy, with the existing National Drug Strategy into a new National Addiction Strategy. This would represent an acceptance of the need for a broad strategy, which tackles all types of addiction, not just illegal drugs, but alcohol and prescription medication addiction. We believe that the Drugs Task Forces should be funded to tackle both drug and alcohol abuse and should be funded sufficiently to expand their role.
- Expand and mainstream divisionary services, such as social, recreation and sports facilities. This will mean giving a sustained funding commitment for projects such as the Young People's Services and Facilities Fund and the National Youth Work Development Plan. Such projects must be guaranteed, regardless of economic circumstances.
- Fine Gael supports the expansion of the Drugs Court system through Dublin and Ireland. The Drugs Court offers a second chance to drug misusers convicted of non-violent criminal offences. The Court operates on the principle of offering an alternative to prison for those found guilty of non-violent crimes, such as shoplifting etc. Participants instead of going to prison must enter drug treatment and engage in education and training programmes. Over a period of 12 months they are subject to regular reviews by Court and drug testing to prove they remain drug-free.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, Fine Gael Spokesperson on Community Affairs.