

# Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2023-2028

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## Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership

Buckinghamshire Council  
BOB Integrated Care Board  
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust  
Here4YOUth (Cranstoun)  
Jobcentre Plus  
One Recovery Bucks  
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust  
Police and Crime Commissioner's Office  
Probation Delivery Unit  
Thames Valley Police  
Violence Reduction Unit



# Foreword

Welcome to the Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2023–28.

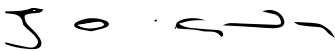
Many people in our society drink alcohol. The majority of adults drink alcohol at lower risk levels. But while the people who tend to drink less have been successfully cutting back over recent years, those who already drink heavily are consuming more.<sup>1</sup>

This misuse of alcohol, and the use of drugs, can have devastating consequences for the person and for those around them. These issues also carry a significant financial cost to our society – it is estimated that drug misuse costs £19 billion per year, and the harms from alcohol costs £21 billion.

Drugs and alcohol dependence often co-exist with other health and social inequalities, like poor mental health and homelessness. Working collectively to address each individual's range of needs is critical to achieving successful recovery.

To develop this strategy we have held a series of multi-agency workshops, as well as establishing our new Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership. All our engagement has emphasised the need to prevent drug and alcohol misuse and act early, and to focus on the positives of resilience and recovery. We are also committed to taking into account the views of people with drugs and alcohol problems and their families to help shape our work.

We want this strategy to empower and support our residents and communities to take a more active role in preventing and reducing the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol in Buckinghamshire. I would like to thank all our partners for their enthusiasm, commitment and hard work in developing this strategy. We look forward to continuing to work with a wide range of partners and our communities to implement our strategy.



**Dr Jane O'Grady**

Director of Public Health and Community Safety  
Chair of the Combating Drugs Partnership





# Contents

Foreword	2
Vision	4
Introduction	5
Priorities	7
Prevention	8
Addressing risk factors and additional support needs	11
Reducing harms and promoting safety	14
Working together	17
Delivering our Strategy	20
References	21



# Introduction

The majority (86%) of adults in Buckinghamshire drink alcohol. Most drinkers report drinking within recommended limits, but over 100,000 Buckinghamshire adults drink at levels that may harm their physical and mental health. As a result, alcohol is the leading cause of disability and of death in working age adults in Buckinghamshire.<sup>2</sup> And the problem is growing. Before the COVID-19 pandemic there was a worrying rise in the number of lives lost due to alcohol in Buckinghamshire – rising faster than nationally.<sup>3</sup> With the increases in drinking during the pandemic, these statistics are expected to get worse unless we act now to tackle them.<sup>4</sup>

Over the last decade the death rate due to substance misuse has risen by 48% in Buckinghamshire. However, there are signs that our actions are starting to take hold, with a fall in substance misuse deaths in Buckinghamshire in 2021 compared to 2020. The negative consequences of drugs and alcohol misuse are widespread in society. Young people consuming drugs or alcohol may experience physical and mental health problems, as well as doing less well at school.<sup>5</sup> Personal relationships between families and friends can break down. The impact on a person's work life can range from lost productivity to unemployment, homelessness, and isolation. There are direct economic costs on health and social care services and the social welfare system due to substance misuse.

The consumption of illicit drugs leads to crime in several ways – obtaining money to fund drugs, behaving antisocially while using drugs, and the actions of organised crime groups involved in supplying drugs.<sup>6</sup> In nearly half (42%) of all violent incidents the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol.<sup>7</sup> We also know that many of our residents are concerned by the litter of discarded drug paraphernalia, as reported in the annual Community Safety Survey.

By working together, we can improve lives. The hepatitis C pathway introduced in Buckinghamshire has facilitated the detection and treatment of this blood borne virus in our injecting drug users. We are close to becoming the first county-wide drug treatment service to have successfully tackled this virus.\* But we need to go further. Looking beyond our treatment services we can use education, employment and housing to facilitate integration within communities.

This strategy summarises our ambitions and commitments to meeting the aims of the national strategy “From Harm to Hope”.<sup>8</sup> Given our local needs, we have decided to tackle alcohol alongside drugs in this strategy. The national strategy aims to break drug supply chains, deliver world-class treatment and recovery services, and achieve a shift in the demand for recreational drugs. In time, it will be supported by a new National Outcomes Framework with additional metrics focused on reducing drug use, crime, deaths, and harm.

\*This refers to achieving 'micro-elimination' status as agreed under the national 'Hep C U Later' programme. The status is awarded when the testing and treatment of hepatitis C amongst eligible service users reaches, and stays at, a very high level – reducing the chance of spread between clients.

This strategy will not be working in isolation. For example, Thames Valley Police are establishing the Custody 2025 programme of change. Custody 2025 aims to use a problem solving and partnership approach to reduce reoffending and improve risk management.

The following principles, based on national guidance, form the foundation of our Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership and this five year strategy:

<b>Prevention</b>	Preventing young people and adults from using illicit drugs or starting to drink excessively in the first place
<b>Shared responsibility</b>	All relevant organisations and professionals see reducing drugs and alcohol harm as an essential part of their role
<b>Person-centred support</b>	Services are designed around the needs of residents and there is 'no wrong door' to access support
<b>Genuine co-production</b>	People who have been personally affected by drugs and alcohol harm will be involved in decision-making
<b>Equality of access and quality</b>	Everyone can access timely, appropriate support for their full range of needs
<b>Joint planning</b>	Organisations share data and analyses to ensure service delivery is more effective and efficient
<b>Coordinated delivery</b>	Services work together and people do not need to 'tell their story' multiple times
<b>Local visibility</b>	All partners raise awareness of the support available and campaign to reduce stigma associated with substance misuse to encourage people to seek support
<b>Flexibility</b>	Services are tailored to local needs, and adapted as those needs change over time
<b>Long-term strategic view</b>	We will take a proactive and long-term approach in delivering improvements to achieve a generational shift in reducing the harms of drugs and alcohol use

# Priorities

We have identified four key priority areas to deliver our vision by working with our partners and reviewing local data and insights:

- Prevention
- Addressing risk factors and additional support needs
- Reducing harms and promoting safety
- Working together



# Prevention





Preventing the use of illicit drugs or the harmful use of alcohol is key to achieving a generational shift in improving the health and wellbeing of our residents. We want to strengthen the aspects of our lives that protect us from substance misuse, and make it less likely that people make unhealthy choices.

We want to build resilience across our county with universal programmes acting as the foundation of our prevention approach. The introduction of statutory health education in schools in 2020 provides an opportunity to develop the knowledge, attitude and skills needed to make an informed choice not to use drugs and resist peer pressure. The recent launch of the Buckinghamshire Healthy Schools Award allows schools to demonstrate their achievements in supporting substance misuse awareness and prevention.

However, we also recognise that some communities may be at greater risk of drug-related harms. We will target additional prevention work to those groups where they are likely to be needed most. Making drugs and alcohol less accessible is also vital to reducing their use.

## We know

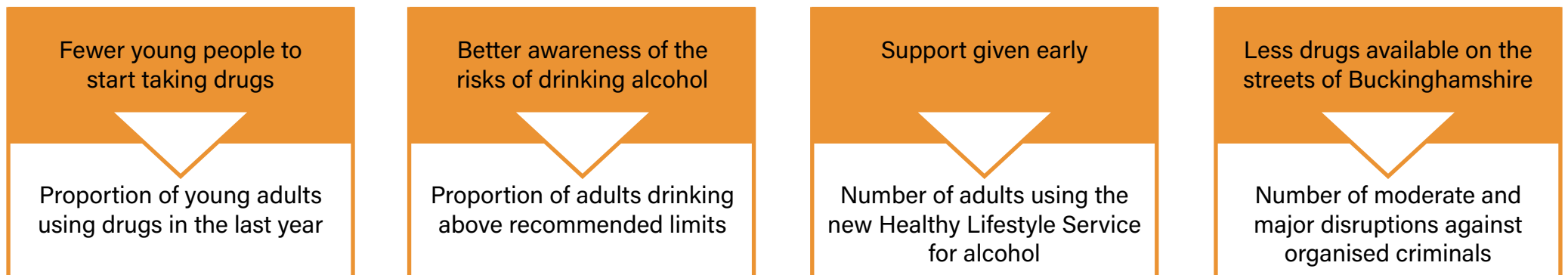
1 in 5 secondary Buckinghamshire pupils report being drunk in the past week

1 in 3 sixth form Buckinghamshire pupils report being offered drugs

1 in 4 Buckinghamshire adults drink at levels which may harm their health (more than 14 units per week), which is worse than the national average

1,482 Buckinghamshire adults are estimated to use opiates and crack cocaine

## We want (and how it will be measured)



## **We will**

**Provide all schools with age-appropriate and evidence-based resources on the risks and harms associated with drugs and alcohol and how to build confidence in making healthy choices**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Target early help offers to schools in areas where the risk of substance misuse is highest in alignment with the Opportunity Bucks programme**

Lead Agencies: Buckinghamshire Council – Integrated Commissioning and Young People's Drugs and Alcohol Service Provider (Here4YOUth)

**Develop a multi-agency communications strategy to deliver health messages and drive behaviour change**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Communications

**Roll out training in Making Every Contact Count (MECC) and Identification and Brief Advice (IBA) to a wider workforce, including JobCentres, so that frontline staff have more confidence to have healthy conversations about alcohol and substance misuse**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Commission the Healthy Lifestyle Service to deliver an enhanced tier one service for people starting to drink at higher risk levels**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Integrated Commissioning

**Develop a method to prioritise which alcohol licensing applications receive input from the public health team, in line with the Statement of Licensing Policies**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Licensing Team and Public Health

**Collate intelligence on the use of nitrous oxide to inform test purchasing, through collection and sharing data relating to discarded cannisters**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Trading Standards and Buckinghamshire Council – Community Safety

**Increase the prevention of illegal sales of underage alcohol and psychoactive substances through more test purchasing and enforcement**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Trading Standards

# Addressing risk factors and additional support needs



People with drugs and alcohol dependence often live in challenging circumstances. These challenges may be long-standing – children of parents who are alcohol dependent are four times more likely to become dependent drinkers themselves.<sup>9</sup> Children and young people who have been placed under the legal care of local authorities, have a fourfold increased risk of drugs and alcohol use compared to children not in care.<sup>10</sup> Children and vulnerable adults are exploited through coercion and violence by organised criminal networks to transport and distribute illegal drugs across the UK in ‘county lines’ activity.<sup>11</sup> Drugs and alcohol can feature in domestic violence, both for the victim and perpetrator.

This strategy recognises that all aspects of an individual’s life can impact on their likelihood of recovery and sustained recovery. Housing problems, financial insecurity, employment issues and changes to personal relationships, such as bereavement, can destabilise progress. Some communities may be more vulnerable to these issues, such as military veterans. Strengthening personal relationships can facilitate recovery.

The strategy also recognises that drugs and alcohol dependence are long-term conditions and relapses can occur, as they do with physical conditions. Responding effectively and supportively to such relapses will facilitate recovery. Recovery is a personal journey moving towards freedom from dependence with improved wellbeing and increased personal and social responsibility.

## We know

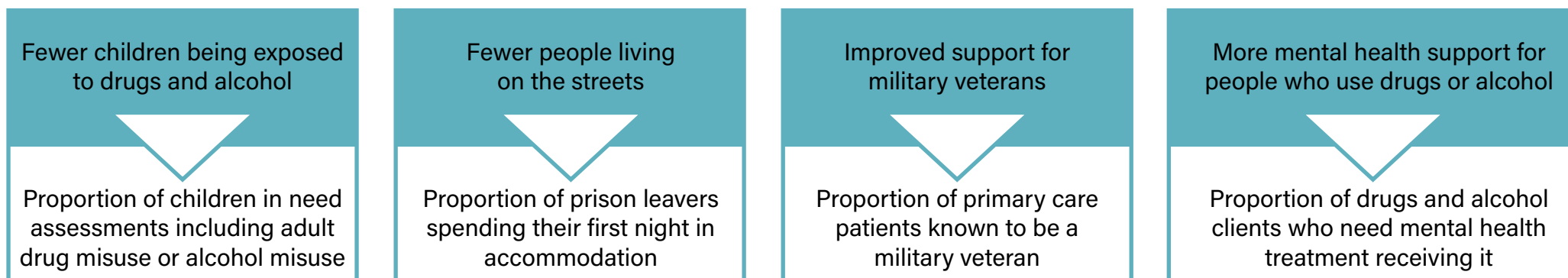
1 in 4 children in need assessments identify adult drug misuse and 1 in 4 children in need assessments identify adult alcohol misuse as contributing factors in Buckinghamshire, both being higher than nationally

Half of adults entering drug or alcohol treatment in Buckinghamshire are unemployed

Nearly 2 in 3 serving military personnel drink at levels which may harm their health (more than 14 units per week) nationally

Half of adults entering drug treatment in Buckinghamshire have an identified need for mental health treatment

## We want (and how it will be measured)



## **We will**

**Promote the active use of the Family and Carers Service available to support those who are impacted by someone's drugs or alcohol misuse**

Lead Agency: Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks)

**Increase the support for children at risk of offending and exploitation through additional youth worker capacity**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Youth Offending Service and the Missing and Exploitation Hub

**Support school leaders to ensure their staff can recognise signs of county lines and child criminal exploitation and know how to report concerns**

Lead Agencies: Buckinghamshire Council – Education

**Improve the early identification and support delivered to people at risk of exploitation who are in contact with the police through staff training and better use of risk and vulnerability markers on the police computer system**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Police

**Increase the number of sentenced people housed on release from prison**

Lead Agency: Probation

**Prevent and reduce rough sleeping through enhanced outreach and specialist support plus increased accommodation options linked to Buckinghamshire Council's Homelessness Strategy and the national Rough Sleeper Initiative**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Housing

**Develop processes to record whether patients are a military veteran, to enable the planning of more tailored support services**

Lead Agency: Integrated Care Board and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

**Embed a culture of joint working between the adult drugs and alcohol service provider and the community mental health service provider**

Lead Agency: Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks) and Community Mental Health Provider (Oxford Health)

**Strengthen the mental health support for vulnerable people being released from prison through the 'Reconnect' project which helps people to access the community services they may need**

Lead Agency: Probation

**Increase the number accessing tier four (inpatient and residential) drugs and alcohol treatment towards the national target by identifying needs and preparing appropriate clients earlier – providing the change of environment and multidisciplinary care some need to recover**

Lead Agencies: Buckinghamshire Council – Integrated Commissioning and Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks)

# Reducing harms and promoting safety



Drugs and alcohol are linked to an increasing number of deaths in England. The health harms from drug misuse depend on the type of drug and how it is taken, but particular issues can include infections or stopping breathing. The number of deaths from prescription medication, such as benzodiazepines, has also been rising across the country. Drinking alcohol long-term can cause liver disease, heart disease and increase the risk of cancer including breast cancer. Both drugs and alcohol affect mental health, and people may be injured while under their influence.

Drugs and alcohol are often linked to crime. The organised criminality behind the drugs trade also makes neighbourhoods less safe. Half of all homicides are linked to drugs, and heroin and crack cocaine addiction are linked to almost half of all acquisitive crime including burglary, robbery and theft.<sup>12</sup> Custody cares for some of the most challenging and vulnerable people in society at a critical point in their life when we can act positively to promote safety. Alcohol is also an important factor in road traffic collisions. Slowed reaction times increase the stopping distance, impair the judgement of speed, and reduce hazard awareness.

Measures can be taken to reduce the harms associated with drugs and alcohol use. For example, naloxone can reverse life-threatening breathing difficulties in an opiate overdose. Widespread community availability of naloxone, such as being carried by street wardens and hostels, can save lives if given early while waiting for an ambulance.

## We know

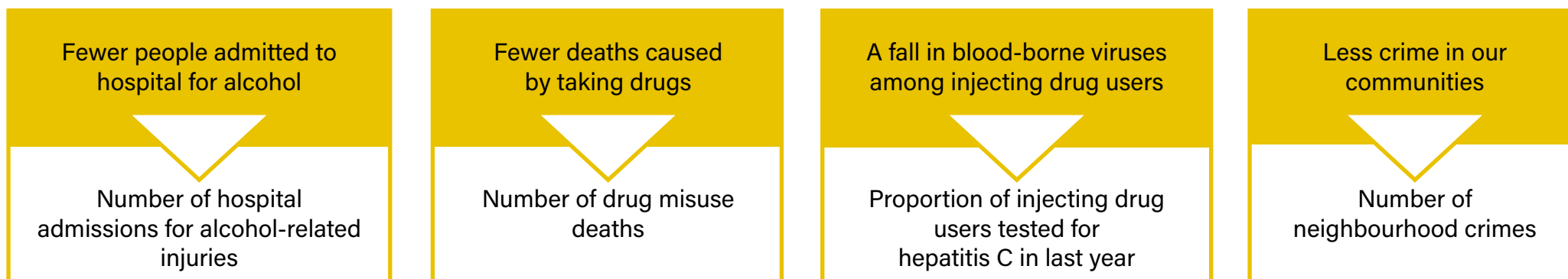
Opiates are implicated in 85% of drug-related deaths in Buckinghamshire

Half of estimated opiate and crack cocaine users in Buckinghamshire are not receiving specialist treatment, similar to the national proportion

Half of all those in opiate treatment in Buckinghamshire have access to naloxone, better than the one quarter nationally

1% of eligible clients entering drug treatment in Buckinghamshire complete a course of hepatitis B vaccination, although it is only 3% nationally

## We want (and how it will be measured)



## **We will**

**Evaluate the success of the Blue Light project in proactively engaging with people with substance misuse who have a very high use of emergency services to re-orient them to more planned care and reduce their need for and use of emergency health and police services**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Conduct an audit of Buckinghamshire drug-related deaths occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic and compare with other areas and pre-pandemic Buckinghamshire audits. This will help us to understand the driver(s) in the reduced number of drug misuse deaths registered in 2021 locally**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Establish a Local Drug Information System (LDIS) to rapidly share warnings on new, potent or contaminated drugs between services**

Lead agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**With partners, review the opportunities to reduce the number of patients dependent on prescription medication. This may include scoping the feasibility of a service to treat prescription medication dependence for those not currently covered by specialist drug treatment services**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Integrated Commissioning and Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Increase the screening of hepatitis C for clients based in High Wycombe to successfully prevent transmission of the virus (achieve ‘micro-elimination’ status for our drug treatment service)**

Lead Agency: Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks)

**Increase the provision of hepatitis B vaccination to injecting drug users and their household and close family contacts**

Lead Agencies: Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks) and Integrated Care Board

**Enhance the identification of people who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of neighbourhood crime. By understanding the triggers for this behaviour interventions can be provided to divert them away from this behaviour**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Police

**With partners, introduce a consistent drugs and alcohol intervention service across all six of the Thames Valley custody suites given that an arrest provides an opportunity to intervene at a reachable moment**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Police

**Develop the use of out of court disposals conditions to support the use of interventions which may be driving criminality – diverting people into drug treatment services as an alternative to custody**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Police



Working  
together



Buckinghamshire has established a Combating Drugs Partnership to take a long-term approach to tackling drugs and alcohol misuse. The Combating Drugs Partnership recognises that drug use doesn't happen in isolation. The effects are felt across the whole public sector and community. To achieve positive outcomes there must be a sustained effort from all stakeholders to reduce the barriers that hinder our progress. Individual services will deliver outcomes more effectively and efficiently by working together, rather than alone.

Working together also aims to ensure that services complement rather than duplicate, or even undermine, each other. It is essential that we reduce, as far as possible, the need for people to keep retelling their story to professionals to limit the risk of re-traumatisation. Our Thames Valley Together project is one example of how we are working in this way. The single biggest finding from serious violence serious case reviews is a lack of information sharing. The illicit drugs market has a recognised link to violent crime.<sup>13</sup> Thames Valley Together will improve intelligence sharing – giving better identification of individuals at risk of harm.

## We know

1 in 10 adults report consuming more than 1000 units of alcohol per week when they enter alcohol treatment in Buckinghamshire, similar to the national proportion

Self-referrals are the main route to drug treatment in Buckinghamshire, at a higher proportion than nationally

Hospitals generate less than 1 in 20 referrals into drug treatment in Buckinghamshire – a lower proportion than nationally

1 in 3 adults released from prison needing substance misuse treatment engage with community services within 3 weeks – this is the same as the national rate, but the new national target aims for 75% by the end of 2023

## We want (and how it will be measured)



## **We will**

**All commit to working together and making our Combating Drugs Partnership a success**

Lead Agency: All

**Publish a needs assessment every three years to ensure we use the most up to date information when reviewing and planning our services**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Council – Public Health

**Organisations across Buckinghamshire will join and support the Thames Valley Together project**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit and Buckinghamshire Council – Community Safety

**Strengthen joint working with other police forces where county drugs lines originate to enhance the identification of gangs, organised crime groups and individuals causing the greatest risk of harm to Buckinghamshire communities and disrupt line holders**

Lead Agency: Thames Valley Police

**Develop processes to gain insights from people who have experienced drugs or alcohol problems to feed into the Combating Drugs Partnership**

Lead Agency: Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership

**Increase referrals, rather than signposting, to specialist drugs and alcohol treatment services when a need is detected by other frontline providers**

Lead Agencies: Integrated Care Board and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

**Further support people leaving custody to access community drug treatment services in the approach to and during release**

Lead Agencies: HMP Bullingdon, Probation and the Adult Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Service (One Recovery Bucks)



# Delivering our Strategy

The Strategy is owned and overseen by the Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership, a strategic group of key agencies all involved with delivering our vision and actions. Tackling this issue is everyone's business.

It is important to recognise this strategy builds on well-established and extensive work relating to drugs and alcohol in Buckinghamshire. The strategy does not attempt to report what is already happening, but instead how we plan to develop and extend what we do. The actions contained in this strategy show the new work, or changes to working, we will pursue to deliver success. But alongside these actions, each organisation will also still provide and continuously improve their core services for our residents.

The strategy has been informed by the findings of our Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol Needs Assessment. All of the statistics used in the 'We know' sections of the strategy have come from the needs assessment. The needs assessment includes data from a variety of sources, alongside national guidance, and current evidence. We are in the process of developing our local outcomes framework to include the metrics which accompany our ambitions in this strategy. Recording and monitoring these indicators will ensure we, as a partnership, celebrate our successes and drive progress to achieve the most for our residents.

This is a five year strategy. In the spirit of flexibility, one of our guiding principles, we expect that these actions will evolve during the strategy's lifetime to stay relevant to our residents.

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