

## Taking stock of SDPC 1-4

### 1. Background

The Academy of Government hosts the Scottish Drugs Policy Conversation, which offers a space for people with varied views to talk about the development of drugs policy in Scotland. It addresses changing patterns of drug use and related harm, developments in policy and practice in Scotland and other countries, new research findings as well as fresh ideas and questions.

This initiative resulted from discussion among a range of stakeholders, prompted by:

- (i) continued debate about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in preventing drug-related harm, informed by both national and international reviews and declarations;
- (ii) the broader context of devolution and constitutional change and the uncertain scope and extent of policy autonomy in respect of drugs in Scotland;
- (iii) the emergence of a new politics of civic engagement centred on deliberative discussion and involving stakeholders from all parts of society.

### 2. SDPC 1 - 4

Four conversations were held between June 2015 and January 2016 attended by approximately 25 people from an invited list of 33. The aim was to host conversations of between 20 and 30 people using the Chatham House Rule. Invitations were through ad hoc connections with interested people and in order to have a wide range of stakeholders participate, including from Scottish Government, representing wide and differing perspectives.

In order to help set the tone and process for conversations, John Sturrock, Chief Executive and Senior Mediator of Core-Solutions, facilitated the inaugural conversations and advised on the developing process.

At a general level, the 4 conversations allowed participants to establish trust and openness based on respect for diverse viewpoints. More specifically, a range of issues and recommendations for enquiry or actual change in policy or practice were raised ( cf notes of each event).

### 3. Main Outcome

The most important outcome of SDPC 1-4 has been the establishment of SDPC as a civic-led and multi-stakeholder space for discussing drugs policy and practice which is **neutral**, has **no taboo** on viewpoints discussed, and **adds value** to, rather than duplicating, work being done by other forums and agencies in Scotland.

These characteristics reflect an increasing number of calls for open discussion about drugs policy to be held both nationally and globally (cf. The Global Commission on Drugs Policy, the Organisation of American States, Transform Drug Policy Foundation Scotland').

SDPC has also been timely in that it coincides with Scottish Government refreshing and streamlining the landscape supporting drugs strategy development, policy

## **Taking stock of SDPC 1-4**

implementation and practice improvement. SG's aim to create a more collaborative framework provides a context in which SDPC's civic-led and multi-sector contribution has a place and can flexibly contribute.

SDPC also responds to wide-spread aspirations emerging in Scotland for more co-production in the evolution of policy and practice across the board and for innovative forms of participatory democracy. In this regard, SDPC has drawn learning from the approaches taken by the Academy of Government, Core-Solutions and social technologies such as Dialogue, the Art of Hosting, and ULabs. In so far as these activities are about promoting paradigm change, the 3 Horizons model of change and Asset based Community Development also have much to offer.

SDPC aims to avoid binary discussions which too quickly polarise and fragment viewpoints. Where discussions have in the past become stuck in this way, SDPC hopes to offer opportunities to re-appraise arguments and re-interpret contributions of research, given that argument is sometimes based on thin or an absence of evidence and is often supported rather than proved definitively by even robust evidence.

### **4. Next Stage**

#### *Fixed Programme*

It is proposed that AoG continue to host, along the same lines, an SDPC programme of conversations every 6 weeks, ideally with **fixed dates and topics**, till end 2016 and a further review.

During this period, SDPC will seek to **fill existing gaps** in stakeholder participation such as professional institutions, other SG departments, Scottish Prison Service, people who use drugs, politicians and political parties, the media etc.

#### *Flexible Development*

The AoG programme of conversations will form a hub, around which encouragement will be given to the flexible development of other ways to open access to a wider number of individuals and organisations who may wish to contribute. For example, through open conferences, discussions in localities across Scotland, with communities of interest, and with service providers and their customers, etc.

#### *Communication*

The online identity and profile of SDPC will be further developed in order to communicate activities, hold learning and knowledge, post thought pieces, identify key links, etc.

### **5. Next Step**

SDPC 5 will be convened to discuss this paper and, if broadly agreed, to consider dates and topics for the next stage.