



SDPC 9: Taking Stock 31st January 2017 Record of Discussion

Record compiled by Anna Ross

Chair: Richard Freeman of the Academy of Government

Facilitator: John Sturrock of Core Solutions

This session was chaired by Richard Freeman and John Sturrock facilitated and helped us collate the various ideas we had on moving forward. 21 people attended (list of attendees at the end of this document), which is one of the best attended sessions yet. It was great to see many new faces and this made us realise that SDPC has now entered a new era and will change to reflect this.

Below is a summary of what was discussed in bullet point form.

Reflection from those who have been involved from early on:

- We have discussed and debated in a collegiate manner, which was helped hugely by John Sturrock. This has provided an opportunity to discuss drugs policy issues which includes all voices.
- It has been a good conversation, even though there have been different perspectives from different professions.
- This has opened up the possibility of disagreeing with each other in a safe environment.
- However, this also led to frustration, a fair amount of frustration, at the pace of change.
- On the other-hand, this reflects the outer world, and makes us ask the question 'how do we change, well'?
- In addition, although there is frustration, people kept coming back because counter arguments allow for more in depth discussion, more reflection on personal opinions and some people felt this had made them better at their job.
- One important element that many agreed on was that SDPC was not good at making decisions – but this is countered by others who felt that it is not the job of SDPC to make decisions – this needs to be explored in more detail at following conversations.
- Need to focus on creating an identity if we are to move forward as a group.
- Website needs to be looked at as providing a platform which could have important network and engagement possibilities.
- Current civil servants are willing to engage and that is positive, although there is frustration that there appears to be a slightly hands off approach, from some of the group.

Reflections for those who have just joined, or are new to the group.

- Turning Point are very excited to be involved in this process, it ticks many boxes and will help them influence policy change at various levels.
- TP have lots of resources and want to get users involved in policy arena, SDPC may be a way to do this.
- TP are excited about the communication element of different people and experiences, and how we collect and use this to inform each other and policy.
- There are difficult conversations that need to be had around the criminal justice system, and SDPC will hopefully be part of that.

- Hopefully there is a shift in grassroots movements so that policy can be affected.
- There needs to be a broad coalition that is based on human rights and compassion.
- We need to look at evidence-based practices and actually implement them without being afraid of the 'public' opinion.

The format of this session involved us separating into 4 groups, and for the purpose of recording accurately we have set out all the responses. The groups were asked to spend about 20 minutes discussing what the relevance of SDPC was, and where do we go from here.

Group 1

- Lots of discussion on developing an identity before we move forward.
- Suggestion of making SDPC a membership based organisation, or at least publishing the names of members on the website so that people can see who is involved.
- Developing a toolkit to take to members organisations and others. Toolkit designed to help people engage with their service users/community. Feedback outcomes would provide a database of public opinion and help instigate public engagement.

Group 2

- A sense of frustration at the group being too focussed on creating consensus at the expense of helping to challenge and create reform.
- The perceived perceptions of the media are limiting and we are not actually challenging anything, yet.
- There needs to be a deeper understanding as to why people use drugs, and why they develop problems, by the public and the government. Simple messages may not work.
- Expressed an frustration at the lack of involvement by the government, but recognised that there is interest and this is more than we could have expected in the past.
- Potential for an Independent Commission into drugs policy in Scotland – many in the room agreed this could be an interesting one to take forward.
 - Importantly it takes the heat off politicians, AND
 - It must be bottom up civic led
 - May be something the RSA would consider – especially if in collaboration with other respected drug policy groups and recovery communities.

Group 3

- Ideas for public engagement:
 - Road shows
 - Contacting people individually – such as your M.P.
 - Hurdles may be designing engagement aimed at different communities. For example, what are the things the people need to know in order to make informed decisions. Or how do we create a space where people feel safe disclosing drug use.
- Interest in how the LGBT community became normalised, maybe we can learn from them.
- Should we contact the RSA and see about funding (ties into group 2's suggestions) for an independent review/ conference/annual event?
- Amnesty – idea for an annual amnesty day where people came out and admitted their drug use – needs further exploration.

- A huge hurdle is reaching people who do not perceive themselves as drug user – but do use recreationally – and getting them on board.

Group 4

- SDPC provides valuable conversations but we need to be aware that when we speak about ‘the public’ we must ask ‘whose public’?
- We need to identify different publics and tailor our engagement to them, highlighting how and why drug policy impacts others.
- Need to be cautious of using social media as online conversation cannot be managed, and stigma harms constructive conversation.
- In regard sustainability of the group we need to source funding. Potentially we can do a mapping exercise to get a better picture of what resources and funding is available.

John Sturrock circulated the groups and took the feedback from the groups to come up with a view reflections, observations and thoughts about proceeding forward in 2017.

- Firstly there is a very different tone, atmosphere and vibe from the initial conversations. People are more relaxed with each other and there is less confrontation.
- However, there continues to be a lot of contradictions that on the one hand pose a challenge, but on the other hand show how complex the area is, and how well SDPC have managed to navigate these. These contradictions include:
 - Flexibility and fluidity – but also the importance of formality.
 - Structure yet spontaneity – how do we do this?
 - Purpose yet the importance of improvisation
 - Importance of process yet an agitation for outcomes and the ability to change policy.
 - Confidentiality, the need to create a space where people can speak in confidence, yet the understanding that we need to be open to more voices and allow our views to be more public.
 - Legislation over policy – how much can be done within the legislative framework, and how much is achievable by influencing the policy field.
 - Commitment versus freedom – should we ask for full commitment to the group, or should people and organisations be free to come a go?
 - Frustration versus flow.
 - Durability versus quick wins – do we seek power or influence, or both?
 - Underlying concepts appear to be hope and optimism, fear and love for our fellows.

John also identified 8 areas that appear to be the focus of the group:

1. Purpose – need to identify what our purpose is
2. Profile – what is our identity?
3. Public and political engagement
4. Openness
5. Funding
6. Platform – creating platforms for engagement

7. Process
8. Practical Solutions.

All agreed we appear to be at a tipping point in regards Scottish drug policy, and wider national and international drug policy.

Finally, John adapted his PRUDDIE concept to fit with SDPC.

- Preparation – **purpose**
- Rapport – **relationships**
- Understanding – **underlying issues that need to be addressed**
- Development of options – **deliberations for the group and for policy**
- Decision making – **direction**
- **Implementation**
- Evaluation –**energy**

Moving forward

Having had a good look at where we have come, and where we may go, we were spurred into action at the realisation that we all want to begin focussing on outcomes and practical solutions, while also retaining the qualities that we have identified as being positive to SDPC.

It was agreed that we will hold the next SDPC meeting in Glasgow, and Aileen O’Gallagher of UWS would help source some rooms. Several people volunteered to help with the organisation and the focus of the next group will be:

- **Public Engagement:**
 - **Profile** – how do we define who we are, membership, coming out about topics and issues.
 - **Toolkit** - Designing an engagement toolkit that members and others can use when conducting drug policy engagement activities. The outcome of these activities can be fed back to SDPC to be published on the website and used as evidence of public engagement and opinion on drug policy in Scotland. Initial work on **this can happen by us identifying 5-10 critical questions for drug policy.**
 - **Platform sharing** – ideas on the website and other ways to share our knowledge.
- **Funding** – mapping exercise or something similar to identify sources of funding. Specifically taking the idea of **an independent commission or bottom up research project further.**

It was also agreed that we could use the email list to share interesting and important information with members of the group.

Attendees

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