

## Read our response to the consultation on proposals for a safer drug consumption facility in Edinburgh

Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) has responded to the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership consultation on proposals to open a safer drug consumption facility (SDCF) in Edinburgh’s Old Town.

As well as sharing our own views, we worked with members of our Edinburgh Living Experience Engagement Group and Buzz Magazine Peer Editorial Board to share a response from people with living experience of substance use.

You can read both responses below.

### Response from Scottish Drugs Forum

<b>Do you support a Safer Drug Consumption Facility (SDCF) in Edinburgh?</b>	<b>I strongly support it</b> I support it I neither support nor oppose it I oppose it I strongly oppose it
<b>Please tell us why</b>	SDF wants to see a network of SDCF across Scotland.  These facilities are a compassionate, evidence-based response to substance use. They provide a safe, supervised environment where people can use drugs obtained elsewhere under the care of trained staff. They also offer access to wider health, social care and treatment services, creating a bridge to support that many individuals would not otherwise engage with.

	<p>In its first year, The Thistle was used 11,348 times by 575 people. Staff responded to 93 medical emergencies, all of which were managed safely on site. Without timely intervention, some of these incidents could have resulted in serious injury or death.</p> <p>International evidence shows that SDCF reduce overdose risk, public injecting and drug-related litter, while improving engagement with healthcare and treatment services. They benefit not only the people who use them, but also the wider community.</p> <p>Opening a SCDF in Edinburgh recognises the reality that people are already using drugs in public and unsafe settings. It would offer a practical, humane response that saves lives, reduces harm and sends a clear message that every life in Scotland is valued.</p>
<p><b>Do you support a SDCF being in the Old Town?</b></p>	<p><b>I strongly support it</b>  I support it  I neither support nor oppose it  I oppose it  I strongly oppose it</p>
<p><b>Please tell us why</b></p>	<p>The feasibility study identified the Old Town as an area of “elevated harm”, with the “densest, largest groups” of drug-related deaths in the city taking place around Leith and the Old Town.</p> <p>Data from the Scottish Ambulance Service shows that “Old Town, Princes Street and Leith Street” have the highest levels of call-outs for non-fatal overdose.</p> <p>We hear through our Living Experience Engagement Group that public drug use is common in the area.</p> <p>The characteristics of the Old Town closely align with those seen internationally where SDCF have been successfully implemented. Locating in this area would be consistent with established evidence and best practice.</p>

	<p>International evidence supports locating SDCF in areas where public drug use, homelessness and drug-related harms are already concentrated. The Old Town already hosts several services used by people with no fixed address, including homeless accommodation and the Access Place. Locating a SDCF alongside existing services would improve access to support joined-up responses.</p>
<p><b>What concerns (if any) do you have about the facility being located in the Old Town?</b></p>	<p>Some people may have concerns about locating a SDCF in the Old Town, given its importance as a tourist destination and centre for hospitality. Concerns may include perceptions around crime, anti-social behaviour or the impact on the area’s reputation. Local businesses may also have questions about its impact on their operations.</p> <p>Concerns should be taken seriously and addressed through meaningful engagement. However, international evidence does not support the view that SDCF increase crime or disorder. Instead, studies have consistently found reductions in public drug use and improvements in drug-related harms.</p> <p>Importantly, the issues that concern many residents and businesses already exist. Public drug use, drug-related litter and the visible consequences of unmet health and social care needs are currently present in the Old Town. A SDCF would not create these challenges; it would help address them by moving drug use off the street and into a supervised healthcare setting.</p> <p>By reducing public injecting and improving access to support, a SDCF could benefit both the people who use the service and the wider community, contributing to a safer and more inclusive city centre.</p>
<p><b>What benefits (if any) do you think the facility could bring to the Old Town?</b></p>	<p>It would provide a safer, supervised alternative for people currently using drugs in public, helping to reduce public injecting, discarded injecting equipment and other drug-related litter. This would benefit residents, businesses and visitors while improving safety and dignity for people who use drugs.</p>

	<p>Evidence shows that SCDF can act as a pathway into health, social care and treatment services. As people who may not otherwise engage with support begin to build trust, they can access healthcare, treatment, housing support and other interventions that improve long-term outcomes.</p> <p>The facility could also support people experiencing homelessness. While some accommodation providers operate policies that prohibit drug use on their premises for understandable safety reasons, this can leave people with no option but to use in public or other unsafe settings. A SDCF would provide a safer alternative, helping people maintain accommodation and reducing the risk of eviction or rough sleeping.</p> <p>Alongside this proposal, there is a strong case for expanding high-tolerance, harm reduction-informed housing. Together, these approaches can improve health, housing stability and wellbeing.</p>
<p><b>What other changes would make the area better and safer for everyone?</b></p>	<p><i>The following list of changes was provided by Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership as part of the questionnaire. We ticked 'yes' to all.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support for people on the streets or in public places</li> <li>• Better access to drugs treatment</li> <li>• Better access to residential drug rehabilitation</li> <li>• Better access to other support and healthcare</li> <li>• Better access to accommodation options</li> <li>• Needle disposal bins</li> <li>• More street cleaning</li> <li>• More law enforcement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community / neighbourhood policing</li> <li>• Improved lighting</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures to reduce speeding</li> </ul>
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**Response from the SDF Edinburgh Living Experience Engagement Group and Buzz Magazine Peer Editorial Board**

<b>Do you support a Safer Drug Consumption Facility (SDCF) in Edinburgh?</b>	<p>One member told us he “strongly opposes it”. All other members (14 people) said they “strongly support it” or “support it”.</p>
<b>Please tell us why</b>	<p>The one member who said he opposes the safer drug consumption facility explained that he is concerned about the potential impact on funding for residential rehabilitation places. He also feels the facility will not be effective if it is not open 24 hours a day.</p> <p>The members who support and strongly support the safer drug consumption facility said:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many people are dying</li> <li>• People would be a lot safer with a safer drug consumption facility</li> <li>• It would help protect against contaminated drugs</li> <li>• It would get drug use and needles off the street – and out of the view of children</li> <li>• It would improve access to other support</li> </ul> <p>One member said that being able to access AccuVein would reduce injecting in the groin and other high risks parts of the body, therefore reducing pressure on the NHS. The wider group was interested in AccuVein and being able to access advice on how to use more safely.</p> <p>The group discussed harm reduction advice to “never use alone” and how this can be difficult to follow, particularly in homelessness services where people often cannot have visitors into their rooms. They said the facility would be a place to go in this situation.</p> <p>Further statements:</p>

- “[A safer drug consumption facility will be] very important... People are using on their own. But stuff is laced with nitazenes. There’s no one there to help them.”
- “If it saves one life, it’s worked.”
- “I support them having one everywhere. I know for a fact if there was one [in Ayrshire] it would get used, 100%. Anything that saves even one life is worth doing, there’s no question about it. Also, with the synthetics and whatnot in the smack, it gives users peace of mind that if they go over someone’s there to help. It’s not safe to use by yourself anymore.”
- “It would be a good thing because Edinburgh has just as many addicts needing help as Glasgow and it's working through here.”
- “As long as it's in the city centre in an area which is already used by [people with living experience] that would be best. People won't be happy whatever bit of Edinburgh it's in probably, because they'll say that Edinburgh is too scenic. But at the end of the day the problem is already there. This is just trying to tackle it and bring a solution into the light.”
- “More drug users will be inside in a safe place rather than using dangerously on the streets where people are collapsing and ODing. There will be less antisocial behaviour too. More people would be linked in with services so it might even help towards homelessness and crime if it’s allowed to be open long-term. But short-term, people will hopefully feel safer ‘cause there'll be less people using drugs on the streets.”
- “I support [a safer drug consumption facility] as it’s a lot safer for people. I’m an Edinburgh lassie and Edinburgh needs this. The Old Town is central to Edinburgh’s needs and the people who need support.”
- "There should be every type of help and support available in every city. The one [in Glasgow] is an amazing resource, it’s surprising it took this long, but at least some progress is happening. Just need it to ramp up to properly help everyone now and in the future.”
- “It saves lives and helps people help themselves their way, instead of forcing anything on them.”
- “Everywhere should have one. Especially if people can have their drugs [checked] to know what they’re taking. It saves lives. But why aren’t the government in support of controlling

	<p>the drugs themselves? Not by arresting people but by being the ones who look after the supply of drugs and overall making sure they're safer and it's all out in the open. Just 'cause there are things in place to make sure we're alright doesn't make anyone think it's okay to take drugs."</p>
<p><b>Do you support a SDCF being in the Old Town?</b></p>	<p>The majority of members said they "strongly support it" or "support it". Two members said they "neither support nor oppose it", with their reasoning being a lack of support in other parts of the city.</p>
<p><b>Please tell us why</b></p>	<p>One member said, "it's the only place it could be".</p>
<p><b>What concerns (if any) do you have about the facility being located in the Old Town?</b></p>	<p>One member explained that he would be worried about experiencing stigma from staff at the safer drug consumption facility and from police working in the area. He understands that police wouldn't be looking to arrest people entering/exiting the facility but feels that his "paranoia" would stop him from accessing it.</p> <p>There was a conversation about people living in other parts of Edinburgh being unable or unwilling to travel to the Old Town. Members questioned what additional support can be made available for people in these areas.</p>
<p><b>What benefits (if any) do you think the facility could bring to the Old Town?</b></p>	<p>Members spoke about having fewer people "hanging about" the street and using in back steps and stairwells.</p>
<p><b>What other changes would make the area better and safer for everyone?</b></p>	<p><i>The group selected the following changes from a list provided by Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership as part of the questionnaire.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support for people on the streets or in public places</li> <li>• Better access to drugs treatment</li> <li>• Better access to residential drug rehabilitation</li> <li>• Better access to other support and healthcare</li> <li>• Better access to accommodation options</li> <li>• Needle disposal bins</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More street cleaning</li></ul>
<b>Other</b>	<p>The group is very keen to see needle disposal bins made available in streets. One person said, “there are a lot of needles in the streets, but people don’t want to just throw them away. Bins would be used.”</p> <p>Members said they would feel more comfortable with a community policing approach – familiar faces who are there to help.</p> <p>There was a general sense that the area could be cleaner. Members also talked about increasing lighting and pedestrianising the area.</p>