

Press release

For immediate release

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## Swanswell to work with Thames Valley Police on the drugs diversion pilot scheme in West Berkshire

Thames Valley Police has launched a drugs diversion pilot scheme in West Berkshire. The scheme, which aims to reduce the harm caused by the use of drugs and drug-related offences, allows offenders in possession of small quantities of illegal drugs an opportunity to be offered a tailored diversion route through Swanswell West Berkshire drug recovery service, to address their use of drugs instead of facing prosecution.

Swanswell, part of the Cranstoun group, has worked in partnership with Thames Valley Police to develop the drug diversion scheme and specialist support programme.

By providing specialist support, the drug diversion scheme aims to prevent the cycle of re-offending and long-term demand upon the police and judicial services.

However, offenders found to be in possession of larger quantities of drugs, those suspected of supplying illegal substances or those who do not engage with the specialist support provided by Swanswell West Berkshire, will face arrest and prosecution.

Assistant Chief Constable Jason Hogg said: "There is extensive evidence to suggest links between drug use and criminality. This scheme is about working closely with our partners, the drug service providers in West Berkshire, to offer a tailored programme of support.

"We hope this will allow those who are offending for the first time, young people for example, an opportunity to become educated about the risks drugs pose and for those with established addictions to seek specialist treatment.

"On a long-term basis, this is a move towards preventing the tragedy that too many families face of losing a loved one to a drugs-related death."

Officers in West Berkshire Local Policing area and those from the force's Stronghold team, which works to tackle organised crime, have received training on the scheme ahead of the launch of the pilot.

Offenders detained in possession of smaller quantities of drugs in West Berkshire will be referred to an appointment with the local drugs service provider, Swanswell West Berkshire, instead of being arrested and taken to police custody. Discretion will continue to be exercised to ensure the most appropriate outcome is applied for each case.

ACC Hogg added: "This is an exciting pilot scheme and is not a step change towards decriminalisation of drugs. Offenders will have one chance to take part in the scheme and if they fail to engage with it, they could find themselves in a courtroom being prosecuted if they are found in possession of drugs in the future. They will not be prompted to attend drugs service appointments by officers, they would have to make the decision to choose the help being offered.

"By not bringing a person in to police custody and using a diversion route, finite police resources will not be stretched further by dealing with those best suited towards receiving help or education. This will enable them to focus on policing priorities, including tackling organised crime and drug dealing in our local communities."

Police and Crime Commissioner Anthony Stansfeld said: "I am pleased to see Thames Valley Police exploring new ways to tackle and reduce drug offences.

"Providing education and specialist treatment to first-time offenders has the potential to positively impact the direction of individuals' lives and free up both police and judicial resources.

"Reducing re-offending is a key priority in my Police and Crime Plan and I fully support this pilot programme which, if successful, will prevent the cycle of drug-related reoffending."

Niamh Donnelly, Director of Operations for Cranstoun, said: "We are delighted the Cranstoun Group has been able to work in partnership with Thames Valley Police to develop the drugs diversion pilot scheme and specialist support programme. By providing a tailored programme of support, we hope to make a positive difference to a number of lives. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to live healthy, safe and happy lives."

The scheme will be evaluated following the three-month pilot to assess whether it has reduced drugs-related harm and demand in West Berkshire and to ensure it is being applied fairly. If the pilot proves successful the force will examine whether it is possible to extend it to the other local policing areas throughout the Thames Valley.

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