**EMBARGOED UNTIL 17:00, TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**Western Bay Area Planning Board Responds to Report on the Impact of Substance Use Across the Region**

**(Turning the Tide – Steering a New Course Towards Hope and Recovery)**

An independent report reviewing the causes and effects of drug use on individuals, families, and communities in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot will help shape improvements to local services.

It will play a pivotal role in redesigning and strengthening support, enhancing leadership and decision-making, and encouraging closer cooperation between partners.

Efforts are already well underway to improve support for people seeking help, but the report’s recommendations will help take this work to the next level.

The Western Bay Area Planning Board (APB), made up of key regional public services, is working to reduce the harms caused by substance use to individuals and communities. The APB’s goal is to transform support for individuals at risk of or seeking assistance for substance use.

As part of the transformation process, the APB appointed an independent Drugs Commission to help it identify where improvements are needed and to remove any barriers to those asking for help.

The Commission’s report, called Turning the Tide – Steering a New Course Towards Hope and Recovery, has now been published.

The report will help the APB’s strategy to not only understand how the work already underway has been effective in creating lasting change, but how the Commission’s recommendations can be taken forward.

Many themes raised in the report are already being addressed including improved governance, easier access to support and giving those impacted by drug use a greater voice in developing and designing services.

\*Deb Lewis, Chair of the Western Bay Area Planning Board, said: “We appointed an independent Drug Commission to investigate the key causes and consequences of drug use, and to identify where we can further improve the changes we are making.

“While the Commission was carrying out its work we have not stood still, and a lot of work has already taken place in recent years to reduce accidental drug related deaths. We are currently transforming our approach to substance use prevention and treatment, creating a more accessible and effective support service.

“Whilst the latest recorded drug use deaths in the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot area have fallen by 23%, every drug-related death is a tragedy. We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable people receive the support and treatment they need.

“All members of the board fully accept the findings outlined in the report which will influence our continued work to improve the service and help us to monitor the implementation of all the recommendations it makes.”

Significant progress has already been made in transforming the support services across the region. These include:

**Leadership:** Leadership has been strengthened with a concerted effort to enhance governance, decision-making and closer cooperation between all partners.

**Improved access to treatment:** People working in and accessing services are being given much more of a say in how, where and when services are provided.

We have started to align substance use services with housing and mental health services, shifting from a narrow medical led approach to a whole system response.

This will include an estates plan that ensures “open doors” across communities where services are highly accessible and co-located.

Waiting times for prescribing services are generally on a downward trend which in part can be attributed to additional resources funded by Welsh Government to target those with the most complex needs.

**Response to overdoses:** In almost 90% of incidents last year where the relevant organisation was notified of a non-fatal overdose, the person was provided with a targeted harm reduction intervention, some of which led to treatment.

**Wider use of naloxone:** More than 650 South Wales Police Officers and front-line workers now carry naloxone, a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose. Probation delivery units and approved premises also have access to naloxone, and their staff have been trained in harm reduction and naloxone administration.

**Detection of poisonings:** Where there are fatal and non-fatal poisonings, there is rapid testing for the presence of synthetic opioids, which are often hundreds of times stronger than heroin, to mitigate further risk.

**Expanded health screening:** Testing for blood borne viruses has been widened with testing sites now including homeless services and hostels to reduce transmission.

**Targeted interventions:** A multi-agency panel has been set up to directly target those people that are most at risk to ensure that they receive the support they need.

**Peer support networks:** One area of work that the board is keen to highlight is the peer-to-peer support network, who are passionate about reducing drug related deaths and work tirelessly to support harm reduction services.

**Housing support:** Significant investment continues to be made in temporary and permanent accommodation for vulnerable people.

**Disruption of illegal drugs supply:** South Wales Police continue to work hard to target the supply of illegal substances, and between January 2024 and June 2025 have disrupted 56 drug lines, made 486 arrests for drug trafficking and supply, and have made significant seizures.

The APB’s primary objective is to develop a comprehensive strategy and delivery plan detailing the APB’s vision, objectives, intended outcomes, and key activities.

The full Turning the Tide report is available to read on the Western Bay Area Planning Board’s website: <https://www.npt.gov.uk/council/partnership-working/western-bay-area-planning-board/>

**END OF PRESS RELEASE**

**Notes to editor:**

* **Media contact:** Liam Hedges, media@npt.gov.uk or 01639 763843
* The Western Bay Area Planning Board covers the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot areas. It brings together representatives of the responsible authorities, and other organisations (invited members and advisors) to improve and strengthen the arrangements for the planning, commissioning and performance management of substance use services across Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. Organisations include Neath Port Talbot Council, Swansea Council, Swansea Bay University Health Board, South Wales Police, The South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue Service, and HM Prison and Probation Service.
* \*Deb Lewis (Swansea Bay University Health Board) was chair at the time the report was received by the Western Bay Area Planning Board. The current chair is Marie Davies (Swansea Bay University Health Board).