

Letter to Mayor following drug testing MQT

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Letter to Mayor following drug testing MQT

Dear Sadiq,

Drug testing in London

Thank you for your answers to my questions about drug testing at festivals in London at Mayor's Question Time last week.

As I said at the meeting, I believe your voice could help to keep people safe this summer.

Drug testing at festivals

I have met with The Loop and they have explained to me that on-site drug testing at festivals is 'back of house' testing where the police maintain oversight of the drugs at all times.

This type of testing helps a multi-agency response based on the intelligence they gather, for example, health and emergency services understanding what harmful drugs are circulating.

I understand the Home Office recently reclarified the licensing requirements, which has resulted in a pause to this important harm reduction testing.

Will you urgently ask the Home Office for further reclarification about the licensing requirements to ensure back of house drug testing can take place at festivals this summer?

London Drugs Forum

It was good to see that you understand the importance of drug checking services to help keep Londoners safe.

You told me that you would make sure that the issue of drug testing would be discussed at the next meeting of the London Drugs Forum.

Thank you for this commitment. I am glad that more than a year after your response to the March 2022 report, Reducing drug deaths in London, from the Health Committee, where you said the London Drugs Forum would look at drug checking, that they will now do this.

Could you confirm the date of the meeting where this will be discussed?

Front of house testing

In my final supplementary question to you I mentioned 'front of house' testing.

This is where people bring and surrender substances that they are concerned about and hand them over for testing. This is then followed up by a one-to-one, face-to-face intervention to explain the results and provide harm reduction advice directing the person to other support services.

An anonymous, non-judgemental health consultation is just as important as the drug checking, because 95 per cent of people who use these services have never spoken to a health professional about their drug use before.

I asked if you could explore with the Home Office how you could provide these drug testing services in London all year round, because we know that some of the most vulnerable Londoners who experience the worst health inequalities don't just use drugs during the summer or at festivals.

These people also tend to use opiates and so are most at risk of overdose.

This is a really urgent issue. In the most recent year with data, almost 300 Londoners died from drug overdose.[1]

Each one of those deaths represents a person with a family and friends who will miss them desperately, and a life that could potentially have been saved if London had year-round front of house drug testing.

Will you explore with the Home Office how you could support provision of these drug testing services in London?

Thank you again for your answers last week, I am looking forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell

Green Party Member of the London Assembly

[1] [Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2021 registrations](#)

Response from the Mayor following Caroline's letter about drug testing MQT

Date: 7 March 2024

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter about my attendance at the Mayor's Question Time session on 20 July and my answers to the questions raised about drug testing in London. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

As I committed to at the session, the London Drugs Forum on 20 September included an item on drug checking services, and ahead of the meeting, the Forum's Secretariat reviewed the Health Committee's report on reducing drug deaths in London.

The Forum was attended by representatives from The Loop and Turning Point, and both organisations presented their experiences and the barriers to developing a checking service in London, as well as the need for a targeted alert system for when new substances were identified. The presentations were followed by discussions from standing members, including the Metropolitan Police Service, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, local authorities, health agencies and the Government's Joint Combating Drugs Unit.

I understand from the Co-Chairs, Sophie Linden and Dr Tom Coffey OBE, that several barriers remain in place but that the Home Office continues to consider licence applications on a case-by-case basis. Turning Point will be embarking on a drug analysis project pilot across Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham, which will include quarterly testing as well as responding to incidents through the Local Drug Information System. The Co-Chairs have asked to receive an update on this work this year. There will also be a future agenda item at the Forum on the rising issue of synthetic opioids in order to look at the roles the different partners can play in addressing the worrying matter.

At this time, as the Government is continuing to consider individual licences for drug checking services, I do not think my intervention in the issue would make any impact. However, the Forum has agreed to keep the topic under review, and I would be happy to update you should this position change.

Yours sincerely,

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

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