

Mayoral Contenders Make Their Pitch on Drugs

LDAN News asked the three main contenders in the London Mayoral election - Boris Johnson (Conservative) Ken Livingstone (Labour) and Brian Paddick (Liberal Democrat) - what they will do to tackle drug and alcohol use in the capital if they make it to City Hall.

BORIS JOHNSON



"I care passionately about public health and I believe the Mayor of London should not only do something but is also morally obliged to do so, when you consider the huge health problems we face in the greatest city on earth. Substance abuse is a clear example where health inequalities are worse in London than they are in the

UK. For example, it is shocking that one in four drug users in the country live in London. I will re-launch the London Health Commission to give the body some meaning and some purpose. Its key task will be improving public health, and the commission will be led by Directors of Public Health. My aim is to ensure that the people who need services, including those who abuse drugs and alcohol, are a key priority of the Commission. The evidence suggests that many drugs users in the capital are young adults. This means we need to tackle substance abuse through better education in school and youth groups. And given that alcohol misuse can start with teenagers, I will not hesitate to name and shame councils that fail to crack down on shops selling alcohol to under 18s. Drugs not only wreck lives, they can lead to an increase in crime. By tackling drugs, we can rebuild lives, make communities stronger, and reduce crime, especially street crime, which blights many neighbourhoods in London."

BRIAN PADDICK



"Of all the Mayoral candidates, I have a long track record of involvement in drug issues dating back to the time when I was the police commander in Lambeth. Despite the controversy surrounding what I wrote back in 2002 on urban75.com, I stand by much of what I said then. I listened to drug users and recovering addicts and I took on board what they told me and I have never forgotten it. Drug addicts need to be treated as victims of crime, not perpetrators, and victims of drug dealers who do not care about the suffering their trade inflicts on others. We must have effective action to take out drug dealing networks from importer to street dealer. For those already taking drugs, harm reduction - as in reducing the harm to addicts and harm to wider society from the acquisitive crime associated with poverty and drug addiction - has to be the way forward. For non-addicts, I believe the emphasis needs to be on educating rather than criminalising people, getting those with credibility to tell young people in particular what the risks are of taking drugs and alcohol. That means recovering addicts and medical professionals going into schools and colleges and talking about their experiences."

KEN LIVINGSTONE

"As Mayor my first step was to establish the Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance (GLADA), bringing together key agencies concerned with alcohol and drugs in London. I made sure that GLADA and its many projects involve service users and Londoners who suffer the harm alcohol and drugs can cause. I made publishing the definitive 'Highs and Lows' reports a key priority. I have supported and championed good practice in boroughs, and among the voluntary and statutory sector, encouraging services to join up. I have produced with GLADA the Crack Cocaine Strategy, the Agenda for Action on Alcohol, and much else, and I have used these agreed policies to make GLA agencies, and the police in particular, understand the priority I place on reducing the harm alcohol and drugs cause to London, and the need for joint working. I am particularly pleased to have supported the Stella project, addressing the complex links between alcohol and domestic violence."



LDAN News asked each of the Mayoral candidates to write 200 words on the following question: "Alcohol and drug misuse is a serious and complex problem in London. What do you see as the main problems, and what as Mayor of London, would you do to tackle substance misuse in the capital?" The election is on 1 May.