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The Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion

Liverpool John Moores University

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Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Liverpool John Moores University and Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

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Introduction

In England and Wales, cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug with 6.4% of adults aged 16 to 59 admitting to use within the last year. Over the last decade, however, there has been a general decline in cannabis use and this figure represents the lowest since measurement began in 1996 (Home Office, 2013).

Domestic commercial cultivation of cannabis has been escalating for a number of years. There is a seeming shift occurring however with cultivation moving from large-scale commercial and industrial property to smaller residential or domestic premises with diversion into multi-occupancy premises to reduce risk. Alongside this there is also evidence of “taxing” (stealing) of crops and debt bondage being used to control local individuals (ACPO, 2012).

In the last three years, more than 5,000 cannabis factories containing over 345,000 plants with an estimated street value of £140m have been uncovered across the North West region. Over the same period, there have been 1,214 people arrested on suspicion of growing cannabis in Merseyside (BBC, 2012).

This report identifies the key themes and patterns to emerge from empirical research undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion at Liverpool John Moores University in association with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. The key aim of the research is to build a coherent picture of contemporary cannabis use and cultivation in Knowsley. The study achieves this by compiling and interpreting data around a number of key issues: the scale of cannabis use and cultivation; knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis use and cultivation; awareness of wider issues and associated impacts relating to cannabis use and cultivation; and the implications for service provision in relation to cannabis use and cultivation.

It is intended that the findings will support health commissioners, prevention and treatment services and crime prevention agencies by further enhancing their understanding of the social, political and economic landscape which surrounds cannabis use and cultivation. As a result, it is hoped that this will allow local policy makers to identify the most appropriate strategies by which to tackle shifts in the contemporary landscape of cannabis cultivation and use.

Research Methodology

The study utilised a variety of qualitative research methods amongst a number of different sample groups. Thirty-six professionals and stakeholders were involved in a World Café research event which encompassed twenty-five focus groups. Sixteen community members took part in four focus groups. Four mothers and one grandmother of cannabis users took part in semi-structured interviews. Twelve users (of which four were also cultivators) took part in either interviews or focus groups.

Format of the report

This report is organised into a number of separate sections and chapters as outlined below.

The **Executive Summary** provides a concise overview of the key themes that emerge from the research.

Chapter One centres on the knowledge and attitudes of the thirty-six professionals who attended the World Café. It identifies the key themes to emerge from the various focus groups with particular attention to service provision.

Chapter Two considers the views expressed by community members. It highlights the central issues to emerge from the four community focus groups and the four interviews with mothers of cannabis users.

Chapter Three focuses on the data generated by interviews with those actively involved in the local cannabis market. It draws attention to the dominant themes to emerge from the focus groups and interviews conducted with twelve cannabis users (four of whom were also cultivators).

Chapter Four draws the report together in a summary and conclusions. It triangulates the data from all the different participant groups in the preceding chapters to produce a single coherent discussion which identifies themes and contrasts and suggests some important considerations for future policy development within this field.

References

ACPO (2012) *Findings from the UK National problem Profile: Commercial Cannabis Cultivation 2012* Association Chief Police Officers.

BBC (2012) *Police to target cannabis growers across the North West* BBC News 5 March 2012.

Home Office (2013) *Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2012-2013 Crime Survey for England and Wales* London, Home Office.

Executive Summary

This executive summary identifies the key themes and patterns to emerge from empirical research undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion at Liverpool John Moores University in association with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. The key aim of the research is to build a coherent picture of contemporary cannabis use and cultivation in Knowsley. The study achieves this by compiling, triangulating and interpreting data from the research participants (Knowsley community members (including mums, users and cultivators) and service providers) around a number of key issues: The scale of cannabis use and cultivation; knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis use and cultivation; awareness of wider issues and associated impacts relating to cannabis use and cultivation; and the implications for service provision in relation to cannabis use and cultivation.

It is intended that the findings will allow local policy makers to further enhance their understanding of the social, political and economic landscape which surrounds cannabis use and cultivation and therefore facilitate strategic policy development within the Knowsley area.

Research Methodology

The study utilised a variety of qualitative research methods amongst a range of sample groups. Thirty-six professionals and stakeholders were involved in a World Café research event which encompassed twenty-five focus groups. Sixteen community members took part in four focus groups. Four mothers of cannabis users and one grandmother took part in semi-structured interviews. Twelve users, four of whom were cultivators took part in either interviews or focus groups.

Sources of knowledge on use and cultivation

- Community knowledge of cannabis use is largely based on experience within their locality. They have little direct experience of cannabis cultivation.
- Professionals' knowledge stems almost exclusively from work, some of which is direct experience but much of which is gained through conversation with colleagues.
- For cannabis users, the community and professionals there is a firm understanding of how cannabis is used and the role it plays on a local level, yet far less specific knowledge is evident around its (particularly longer term) effects and the more technical aspects of the drug.
- Cultivators are very knowledgeable about the skills and equipment required to grow cannabis. They are also keen to stress that this knowledge is easy to come by. All those interviewed were taught by someone they know and are aware of the information being widely available on the internet.
- For both the community and professionals, knowledge and attitudes around cannabis use is interlinked with concerns they hold around other key socio-political factors such as young people, parenting, aspiration and poverty. Opinions are also influenced by attitudes to other drug use and in many cases conflate cultivation of cannabis with generic dealing of drugs.

Knowledge of the Incidence, Profiles, Motivation and Impacts of Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Incidence and patterns of use

- Cannabis use is widespread and there has been an increase in its use and availability over the last two decades, particularly of stronger forms, namely skunk.

- Cannabis use appears to be a normative feature of most communities in that its use has become more overt and noticeable. However sections of the community remain where cannabis use is not commonplace.
- There are changes in patterns of cannabis use from recreational to daily use, the latter of which is perceived to be dependent use. This pattern is more likely to exist amongst the young, unemployed and those without parental responsibilities.

Motivations for use

- There are a range of motivations for cannabis use i.e. to relax, socialise, an exercise in rebellion / risk-taking behaviour, to self-medicate and due to boredom/time availability. The latter is demonstrated by the fact that desistance from, or reduction in, cannabis use occurs through an 'aging out' process and the development of adult responsibilities/occupations. Notably the aging out process for many is delayed in the current economic climate.
- There is increased acceptability and normalisation of use e.g. for young people use can be related to peer *association* (not peer *pressure*) whereby cannabis use is a shared experience amongst friends with associated normative concepts, in particular that its use is unproblematic.

Profiles of users

- Closer examination of initial beliefs that 'everyone is doing it' reveals that whilst all social groups *can* use, the most prevalent users are young people, particularly males. These perceptions may relate to whose use is most overt and obvious.
- Young people's use is linked to their time of life i.e. most likely to experiment with cannabis in the transition to and early years of senior school.
- Those with a range of social problems (homelessness, unemployment, criminal records and service users) are the highest users of cannabis.

Tolerance and reporting of use

- Cannabis users feel that intolerance of or objections to their use does not impact on their consumption, although, the small number interviewed were mainly young people describing their parents disapproval.
- There is increased general tolerance of cannabis use, reflected by a lack of reporting, albeit potentially age differentiated in that older people are more likely to report use. The reluctance to report for the majority relates to issues of police-community relations, wider cultural concerns relating to not wanting to be seen as 'a grass' and acceptance of the use of cannabis.
- There is a paradox evident around tolerance in that whilst it is ostensibly 'accepted' in communities, there are a range of anxieties around its use. These are represented by four typologies of tolerance: 'unproblematic acceptance' (those who genuinely accept cannabis use as unproblematic); 'pragmatic ambivalence' (those who tolerate cannabis use as long as it does not impact on them directly); 'comparative endurance' (those who tolerate use as they see other drugs as more harmful); and 'coercive compliance' (those who are coerced into tolerance due to a fear of reprisal).

Impacts of use

- Views on the link between crime and cannabis use differ: Some say cannabis is linked to petty theft to fund use, some feel there is little connection between serious crime or anti-social behaviour and cannabis use and some believe use is linked to criminal gangs and violence. The study identified examples of serious domestic abuse in the families of cannabis users. These are key issues for service provision, but cannot be extrapolated to all cannabis users due to the range of social factors involved and the small sample size.

- Key anxieties around cannabis use are: Involvement with dealers in order to gain access; the potential impacts of stronger strains of cannabis including mental health related issues; gateway theory (i.e. that cannabis use leads to the use of stronger substances); increased violence in the home and the social impacts of cannabis use on both an individual and community level.

Incidence/scale of cultivation

- The community is largely unsure of the incidence and extent of cultivation, not least because of its concealed nature, but there is a belief that domestic cultivation is increasing, confirmed by cultivators themselves. Professionals report that cultivation is more fragmented, i.e. a shift in cultivation to domestic premises, mainly in public housing but increasingly in private rentals.

Profiles of cannabis cultivators

- The demographic profile of cultivators is largely unknown. There is a belief that it happens in *all* socio-economic groups but that this is *most likely* to be attractive to those struggling to find (well paid) employment and income in the mainstream market, and those seen as having 'less to lose,' for example the unemployed, young males and those without dependents.
- Some report that landlords are knowing participants in cultivation whilst most identify them as unknowing victims of cultivators.

Motivation for cannabis cultivation

- Three categories of cannabis cultivators are identified: People growing for their own use; those coerced into cultivating for a dealer and those voluntarily cultivating for a dealer.
- Finance and structural/economic conditions are the main motivators for cultivation, although coercion, vulnerability and victimisation are also features. A lack of role models and aspirations as well as the accessibility of equipment, growing capacity and low detection prospects all contribute to motivation.

Reporting and tolerance of cultivation

- Cultivation is said to be underreported due to tolerance. The same four categories of tolerance evident in relation to cannabis use apply to cultivation; 'unproblematic acceptance' (cultivation is unproblematic); 'pragmatic ambivalence' (tolerate cultivation as so long as it does not affect them, others, children or the exploitation of vulnerable groups); 'comparative endurance' (tolerate as cultivators of cannabis are less 'big league' than other drug producers or dealers); and 'coercive compliance' (tolerate due to fear of reprisals). As a result, the community will report cultivation in certain circumstances, for example large-scale production, where it directly impact on them and in instances where children are neglected or at risk of harm.
- Concerns around cultivation include links to antisocial behaviour and organised crime. However, much of this stems from the conflation of the impacts of cultivation and dealing.

Impacts of cultivation

- There are financial incentives to cultivate cannabis, particularly in the current economy.
- From a public finance perspective, cultivation is suggested to reduce criminal justice costs as it reduces levels of acquisitive crime.
- Many arrested for cultivation are said to be outside the typical service user profile. This is particularly a concern due to the vulnerability and exploitation of many of those who cultivate.
- Cultivators risk increasing extant social problems through loss of access to children, criminal proceedings and increased potential for debt through loss of tenancies, future housing prospects and electricity meters.

- Cultivation is often associated with theft of electricity and the upscaling of criminality. Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are seldom linked to cultivation but most feel that dealers control patches of cultivators which has the potential to cause turf issues.
- Benefits of cannabis cultivation include skunk being less likely to be adulterated than other forms of cannabis, whilst drawbacks include skunk having higher THCs which may make for a more addictive product.

Current and Future Responses to Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Service availability and provision: Use and Cultivation

- Some say cannabis services exist in Knowsley, mainly those who identify the capacity of generic services to meet cannabis users' needs. Others say there are no services for cannabis users: because cannabis use is not seen as an issue; due to a lack of specific services for cannabis users; or because there is a lack of information and advertising about what is available and for whom. The latter reflects a need to develop a multi-agency database containing information on what services are available, with clear lines of responsibility and admission criteria.
- Cannabis services need to be: Available, confidential and anonymous, delivered by the right people in the right way, include self-help groups, maintain a proactive preventative ethos, include harm reduction approaches, acknowledge the importance of motivation to change, be tailored to the requirements of the users as well as the capabilities of the staff and need to address a wide range of health, economic and social factors, not solely drug use.
- There is a lack of knowledge evident amongst professionals around cultivation but also around service provision. Voluntary, publicly accessible education sources and service information are seen as best practice, as is public consultation and engagement.
- Cultivation services currently fall mainly into the remit of the police, housing professionals and Stronger Families. Some suggest a more coordinated, recognised strategy, which outlines the responsibilities and roles of all agencies should be developed in order to ensure all related issues are tackled.

Education: Use and Cultivation

- Professionals both identify and demonstrate a range of educational needs. Contemporary knowledge on cannabis locally, nationally and internationally is crucial for them to maintain credibility with clients and to respond effectively and appropriately to their needs.
- Education is crucial for young people as a preventative measure (so that they can make an informed choice of whether to use the drug or not) and as a harm reduction measure (in case they decide to do so). This education needs to happen in schools, at an early age (pre-secondary), have appropriate content, tone and medium and must acknowledge what young people currently have, do not have and the benefits they currently see in using cannabis.
- There is a need to educate adults, in particular parents, both to help them make their own decisions around cannabis use and to support them in responding to the activities of their children. This must be accurate, up-to-date, balanced and presented in a way that stimulates interest rather than feels imposed.
- A large number of services have little in terms of education around cultivation, either for themselves or to offer to their service users. Information is needed on the law, identifying and reporting cultivation and harm prevention/minimisation.
- There is a need for a mapping of the response and responsibilities of each organisation to cultivation in Knowsley. Responses need to include the provision of structural opportunities in order to provide alternatives to cultivation as a means of income (e.g. training courses, employment and support).

Ethos (enforcement, support, legalisation): Use and cultivation

- There are clear tensions within and between agencies in deciding the best approach to take in response to cannabis i.e. whether enforcement or support is most appropriate. In reality, cannabis use tends to be dealt with by support whereas the response to cultivation is primarily enforcement.
- Many feel that enforcement and deterrence exacerbate problems in their failure to tackle the underlying issues i.e. that cultivation and use are symptoms more than causes of social problems. For example policing (in the broadest sense) of cultivation can add significantly to social risks in terms of loss of tenancy and its related social problems, as well as people hiding mental health and other problems for fear of reprisals.
- Balancing enforcement and support is vital as it acknowledges rights and obligations on the part of the state and of individuals. This means assessment and a case by case and approach is required to identify appropriate levels of enforcement and support for each user and cultivator.
- Many feel that the most appropriate response to use and cultivation is legalisation, at least of possession and small scale cultivation. Notably, some of the cultivators were against legalisation, potentially in light of the detrimental impact legalisation would have on the income of those growing cannabis to sell rather than for personal consumption.

The way forward: Information-gathering and a multi-agency approach

- Responses to cannabis use and cultivation must be multi-agency, in which partners have collectively agreed strategies, specific roles which all agencies subscribe to and regular meetings / updates to refresh, reinvigorate and maintain up-to-date policy and service provision.
- An information gathering exercise is required, both to collate up-to-date knowledge on services in Knowsley and contemporary, credible research and education on cannabis in all its forms so that service providers and the community can move forward in an informed way.

Professionals

This chapter emerges from a World Café event held at the Huyton 'Our Place' young people's centre in August 2013. The day was set up to address a range of research questions including: Knowledge of the scale of the cannabis use and cultivation; related impacts (health, criminal and social); knowledge and perceptions of service provision; sources of knowledge; impressions of the impact of changes in cannabis production to the services provided and views on service availability, best practice and gaps.

Thirty-six professionals were in attendance, all of whom work in and around Knowsley, with representation from a broad range of third sector and statutory organisations including probation, prisons, police, housing, drug services, young people's services, council, NHS, social care, Citizens Advice Bureau, Stronger Families, mental health teams (youth and adult) and Young Advisors. The World Café consisted of twenty-five focus groups, each of which produced data in the form of posters and recordings of the discussions. The results of these are collated thematically in this chapter.

Knowledge of the Incidence, Profiles, Motivation and Impacts of Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Incidence, types and patterns of use

Incidence of cannabis use in Knowsley is said to be high, with levels of use described as 'massive,' 'silly numbers,' 'commonplace' (World Café, Posters). Use is also said to be comparatively higher and less covert now than it has been historically.

'Use is higher now than say when I was a teenager.'

'You wouldn't see people walking around smoking a spliff, but they'll do it now (World Café 1, 2).

'It's not deemed as abnormal. It's normal now. It's the rule rather than the exception' (World Café 1, 1).

'You walk down the shops and you see people smoking it like it's nothing. It just normal. It's your right' (World Café 1, 5).

'No one would ever say "put that out" or "what are you doing" it's just normal' (World Café 1, 5).

In terms of geographical areas, participants feel cannabis use is common across the borough, although one area received specific mention.

'From my own experience in Stockbridge Village, it's the norm' (World Café 1, 1).

However, it is also acknowledged that there may be 'sample bias' in that the type of people that the participant professionals work with are at higher risk of social problems and relatedly of drug use.

'Probably you've got quite a jaded group here to be honest because we're all to do with...like you've got a heavy police presence in this group and so you think, you know, my perception will be that it [cannabis use] is really high cos of the job I do and I'm exposed to it' (World Café 1, 2).

Relatedly, it was also suggested that cannabis use is prolific in some areas and sections of the population but that this could not be generalised to the entire of Knowsley.

'I wouldn't say it's the biggest issue in Knowsley because it's kind of restricted to certain places and certain ages' (World Café 1, 3).

'We assume that everybody is using cannabis in some shape or form but actually that isn't the case' (World Café 1, 3).

Cannabis is said to be the main drug of choice (after alcohol), although cocaine is also suggested to be widely used. Cocaine is said to be patterned by weekend recreational use whereas cannabis is more often daily dependent use. The latter is said to be prevalent as people most often use skunk which is classified by levels of strength (i.e. levels of THC), with the highest levels being most sought after and most addictive.

'[Resin] is so sixties!' 'We've got a drugs box and when I first came into working with [young people's services] and we'd get the drugs box out and the young people'd be looking at it. Now that stays well in the box. There's just no need to get that out at all' (World Café 1, 5).

'The majority of the young people I see won't touch resin.'

'It's dirty.'

'They have like a class system to it.'

'The majority of young people I see go for the skunk or haze...'

'They go for the higher levels.'

'It's changed now – they go for the high levels of THC. So the resin doesn't do it for them anymore' (World Café 1, 1).

A spectrum of cannabis strengths are described, with 'haze' as strongest, followed by skunk, then 'green' and finally 'pollen' and 'resin' with the lowest strength. As the quotes above suggest, resin has lost popularity. It is suggested to some young people as a means to reduce use but 'they won't even touch it' (World Café 1, 1), preferring instead to use pollen to reduce their use, in a similar manner to a methadone reduction script for heroin.

Participants say skunk is more addictive than the 'normal' cannabis which has historically been common, as it is often used daily, giving the appearance of dependent use.

'You get young guys who start off on that [skunk], they get it free, and then they've got to have twenty quid's worth or nothing. They get sucked in that way' (World Café 2, 1).

'A lot of the young people that I see, they're not just having a spliff or two of an evening. They're using from the minute they get up to the minute they go to bed. So they're smoking it like they'd smoke twenty ciggies' (World Café 2, 3).

Most suggest the addictive nature of skunk is due to cross breeding of cannabis plants to increase strength but there is one (debatable) suggestion that skunk is now doctored with class A drugs (see 'Themes and Conflicts' chapter for discussion).

'Some of them are now [using other drugs] inevitably. Because of the way it's now cultivated...the water and irrigation system has got heroin in it which will then bring the plant on. Makes it into superskunk and it's more addictive because it contains heroin' (World Café 1, 2).

This is countered by other groups who reason that the expense of class A drugs makes them prohibitive as adulterants.

'I think we need to dispel the myth that the dealers spray it with heroin because they don't. Because you'd be mad.'

'You don't use your heroin. Why would you waste it?'

'It's not cost effective' (World Café 5, 5).

A principle concern about the increase of skunk use is that young people using it for the first time are assuming it is like the standard cannabis they have previously tried or heard of, therefore not realising its strength.

'But vulnerable young people are being introduced to this for the first time, are not aware of the potency...There's a naivety that "it's only cannabis" and they're not realising the strength of it' (World Café 1, 1).

Equally there are concerns that parents and professionals do not have up to date knowledge of the range of cannabis types available or their effects. This makes it difficult for both professionals and the public to respectively gauge risk and make informed decisions.

'Over the last number of years, cannabis has changed quite a lot. And the impact of cannabis has changed in Knowsley. But actually in general I'm not sure that we've all caught up with that either, professionally service wise, or in the community as well. I think there will be some areas of the community that are very knowledgeable and say they know the different types of cannabis, you know, "we use that types and that's ok we understand that but our children are starting to use this type and we're not happy about that" but the vast majority of the population don't ...know or don't want to know and just don't want their children involved' (World Café 2, 2).

The most common way to purchase cannabis is in a £20 bag, with amounts and strengths in these bags varying between dealers. Perhaps reflecting a broadening (and particularly youth) market, it appears cannabis can also be purchased as a ready-rolled individual 'joint' rather than a whole £20 bag.

'People may not want to buy a bag of skunk, they can buy a readymade spliff.'

'They may not have enough money to buy a bag, so you buy a joint and either way you've got what you want' (World Café 1, 3).

Reasons /motivation for use

Acceptability and normalisation

Many say cannabis is widely used as it now has high levels of acceptability. Most groups say that use is not hidden and few users feel the need to conceal their use. In general it is felt that cannabis is used for relaxation purposes, not least due to its easy accessibility. There are, however, some misconceptions about the cost of alcohol compared to cannabis in that some think the latter was now a cheaper option.

'I think it's just a relaxation side of things...[and] alcohol's expensive.' (World Café 1, 2).

'It's an affordable luxury that the cultivation has made cheaper. It's probably cheaper than alcohol.'

'Well no, it's more expensive than it's ever been at the moment.'

'No it's not a cheaper option than alcohol'

'When I was working in the YOS the young people would get four joints out of a twenty bag. So that's fiver a joint. Now that's not cheap is it?' (World Café 1, 5).

The normative nature of cannabis use is suggested as a reason for people using, for instance, different generations of the same family smoking cannabis together.

'It's cross generational I'd say. There's grandparents actually smoking with their grandchildren that I know of' (World Café 1, 1).

'The ones up to fifty, they're the one with the young people living with them and that's what they do.'

'So do the kids introduce them to it or do they introduce it to the kids?'

'I think the kids sometimes introduce the parents to it. I think it's the norm in the house. They can't see it being a problem' (World Café 1, 2).

Relaxation, socialising and self-medication

A number of times a bifurcation is noted, in that different generations are perceived as likely to use for different reasons and, relatedly, in different contexts. Specifically older users are said to smoke at home for cannabis's medicinal properties, whilst younger people are thought to use with friends for social reasons and due to peers using.

'The use in the older age group, generally, from our experience, is more about medication. They will come to use with 'it's a painkiller, I use it for my arthritis'

'With the younger age group I think it is more of a social thing.'

'I think the older ones stay at home and do it'

(World Café 1, 2).

Interestingly, it is also suggested that problematic cannabis use is easier to conceal than alcohol use and relatedly less likely to cause problems in public spaces.

'...if you're walking around with bags of alcohol people can say they've got an issue. But if you've got a bit of weed in your pocket and you're going to go home and smoke it, it's just cheap and nobody knows you've got an issue with it' (World Café 1, 2).

A 'natural' product

Users perceptions of cannabis are said to be that it is a natural product therefore of no concern from a health perspective and in fact may have health benefits.

'[They say] It's a plant, it's from the ground, it's natural'

'It clears your lungs'

'It helps you concentrate' (World Café 1, 1).

It is suggested that in surrounding areas, cannabis use might be motivated by schools who appear to tolerate it (notably here, Knowsley is seen as better at tackling the issue).

'Just to take it outside of this area...it's horrendous in Liverpool. It's like, the kids are just, they know the score, they know it's tolerated; it's tolerated in the schools'

'Same in Sefton'

'And I'm disgusted by it to be honest. Because Knowsley is quite good. I mean it is high, the use is high...but I don't see many kids walking round smoking the old weed and that.' (World Café 1, 2).

Peers and cannabis use

Peer *pressure* as such is not mentioned in the focus groups and people did not suggest that young people are using because they felt pressured to. Rather, the notion of cannabis use as a culture, both in families and friendship groups, comes up repeatedly. In particular for young people it is suggested that peers become pseudo-family and it is this connection, engagement and shared experiences and values which promote the use of cannabis, rather than a power play in which vulnerable people are forced to use.

'It [cannabis use] will still happen anyway. Because you go into the social make-up of why, their family is on the street more than in the home, you're looking at the wider implications. Those people will always take on what's going-on on the street because their mates are their family and they'll do what their mates are doing' (World Café 5, 2).

'Gateway' theory

A number of people suggest 'gateway theory' i.e. cannabis use leading to use of heavier drugs.

'I've always been of the mindset that if you're trying skunk and cannabis that's just a preset for something else. That might be wrong, I don't know...I think it gives you the confidence to try something else' (World Café 1, 4).

'Through skunk and through meeting people who sell skunk...you are open to that...someone will sell you other drugs'(World Café 1, 4).

The concept that having to access cannabis through dealers who may offer access to other drugs, as well as the idea that cannabis use for young people is simply one of a number of 'risk-taking' behaviours are worthy of further consideration, but gateway theory itself is something which has been repeatedly addressed in substance misuse research and demonstrated as unfounded. A simple calculation of the large numbers who try cannabis compared to the very small numbers who use class A drugs demonstrates that this theory is tenuous.

In fact, it is pointed out that the 'normalisation' of cannabis smoking in some groups certainly does *not* equate to a normalisation of *all* drug use. Peer pressure can actually work in positive ways here.

'I think some might go on to more but I think they move away from that group who are all cannabis or skunk smokers and if you're going to try something different you're very quickly ostracised from that group...They see any other drug as a dirty drug' (World Café 1, 4).

'Cos it' [cannabis use] is such a normal thing...It's accepted. If someone was on crack or something like that it'd be a different story.' (World Café 1, 5).

'I know some people who just smoke and don't drink and aren't interested in anything else' (World Café 1, 4).

Profile of users

Age

With regard to age, opinions differ across the groups in terms of whether the 'normalisation' of cannabis use applies solely to young people or across all generations/age cohorts.

'It's the norm. Not all generations, but definitely the younger...Not me Nan's generation but definitely, say, some middle aged...up to fifty' (World Café 1, 2).

'It's young men.'

'It's people who have problems.'

'No I think its middle aged.'

'I think it's anyone.'

'No it's just men.'

'I think it starts from a young age – now every young man has had a go' (World Café 1, 2).

'You get the olders who've been smoking it for years. And then you get the young ones who are only just starting and learning about it...[The older] are like thirty, forty, who've been smoking it all their life and raised children around it and that...The younger are fifteen to eighteen, twentyish' (World Café 1, 3).

'There was a funeral...And a group of people from the funeral come from upstairs...And they weren't young people, they were suited and booted at a funeral...waiting for a taxi and just having a joint' (World Café 1, 5).

Most groups at length agree it is mainly young people using with the caveat that lots of older people use too.

'I would say there is more use in the younger generation. Not that it's not happening, but I don't think it's as prevalent with the older generation as it is with the younger..[aged] forty and below' (World Café 1, 1).

'Use more in the younger generation,' 'age '14 plus,' '15-20,' '12-18' (World Café Posters).

Used by 'middle aged' groups,' 'up to 50 not uncommon,' '30-40' (World Café Posters).

There is also an important point made that young people's use may appear more common when it is actually just more obvious as they use on the streets, whereas older people are more likely to use in their own homes.

Gender of users

There is little agreement about which gender is most likely to smoke cannabis. Some suggest that (particularly young) males use far more commonly as it is more socially acceptable and outside of the gender roles assigned to women.

'If you're a young mum and you're pushing a baby around, you're not going to be having a joint. I suppose it's more socially accepted for the males...But in any form of drugs.'

'Young men do walk round with it like making a statement like "look at me"' (World Café 1, 5).

'I'd say it's more the males. The females seem to be more alcohol' (World Café 1, 1).

'At the moment I don't think there's a gender issue. I think it's quite balanced it's quite even, the use of it, the effects of it.'

'I think boys are more inclined to use it, but I don't know.'

'I thought that.'...

'I don't think there's any difference from what I've seen. It's just as many girls as boys and they're all behaving in the same way' (World Café 5, 3).

Others say it is actually young males who are users of both cannabis and alcohol and that the alcohol use is often at a problematic level in these cases. It is also agreed that the use of the two drugs is not simultaneous.

'I have to see them about cutting back on the alcohol use, you know, sometimes, as they use alcohol earlier in the day...they won't mix the drug, they won't mix the two drugs. Is that your experience?'

'Yeah, absolutely' (World Café 1, 1).

Others disagree that males were the main cannabis users, feeling it is mainly women who use, particularly mums, the latter to cope with the strain of care responsibilities.

'Erm, I would agree with that on the surface of things, that males are using cannabis and females are using alcohol, but when you go down a bit deeper, the females are definitely experimenting with it. They might not be using it every day, to the same level the young lads are, but they are definitely there and it's a part of what they do on a day to day basis' (World Café 1, 1).

'Females often use cannabis alongside alcohol' (World Café, Posters)

'Lots of mums coming into services who use' (World Café, Posters).

'It's mums [who use cannabis]. Certainly in terms of our experience...some of our parents will say they've been using since the age of eleven, twelve' (World Café 1, 3).

As with age though, it is suggested that young women may well use as much as males but more in private/ less publicly. The gender division is suggested to be based on young men's overt use being publicly acceptable, whilst young women are described as 'skanks' (World Café 1, 3) if seen using publicly, so more often use in private.

Social problems ('seven pathways' factors) and use

In terms of accommodation, homelessness appears to increase the likelihood of cannabis use, in particular for young men.

'Eight out of ten young people in emergency accommodation are using, almost exclusively males' (World Café, Posters).

A criminal record is also viewed as linked to increased levels of use.

'80% coming through YOS are users' (World Café, Posters).

'In the Youth Offending service, cannabis is a key issue for our young people and you're talking from the ages of twelve to eighteen' (World Café 1, 3).

And unemployment is also suggested as a key factor.

'Boredom...For those who find it hard [to find a job] they get bored. And I think they think "I'll just have a spliff" and it goes from there' (World Café 1, 4).

In contrast, education appears to be a protective factor as pupils are said to report relatively lower levels of use with only a fifth having admitted to trying the drug.

'20% self-reported pupils in Knowsley use' (World Café, Posters)

No common profile for users

Despite all the suggested risk and protective factors, a number of groups say actually there is no clearly identifiable profile to users in that it happens across all groups. It is suggested that the focus tends to be on lower age groups as the media report on young people and criminalise their behaviour most.

'It's across the board. Pensioners mums dad females kids professionals girls boys. But because the media focus on the young people, it's all them, it's all their fault. But my mum's friend does it and she's sixty' (World Café 1, 4).

Knowsley neighbourhood/ community views of cannabis use

Tolerance and reporting

It is repeatedly stated that most people will not report cannabis use as tolerance of the activity has increased. The reasons for this increase in tolerance however are diverse. Some feel tolerance is a case of simply accepting something that is viewed as a less harmful drug.

'It's a bit more blasé now... I'd say it is more tolerated. Well I say tolerated, it's like, you'd tolerate it more than you would a smack head, that's what I mean by tolerated (World Café 1, 2).

'Although the class A, B and what it [cannabis] is this week debate and all that can go on forever. On the streets anywhere in the north west it [cannabis use] is not really, you're not really committing crime...it doesn't have the negative image of heroin use' (World Café 1, 4).

Some say people will not report due to feeling the police cannot or will not do anything or if they do it is not a deterrent.

'It's too big an issue to deal with so it's probably, you know, more lenient with them, issuing cautions and that. So the perception might be that actually the police don't do enough. I'm not saying that's the case but maybe that's the perception' (World Café 1, 2).

'If you are stopped and you've got a spliff or you've got a bit of cannabis on you for personal use you are getting a street caution or you are getting a fixed penalty. It's not exactly, you know, a big deal I wouldn't have thought... So the punishments are relatively small' (World Café 1, 2).

There is a suggestion that some people tolerate cannabis use through ignorance of its realities - 'tolerance is based on what people think the drug is and its effects' but it has 'completely different effects' (World Café, Posters). Some feel people actually are not tolerant but accept it because they do not want to go against users themselves or the majority who find it acceptable.

Others suggest that tolerance is due to people not caring about things that do not affect them directly, because it is 'not my kid' (World Café, Posters) for example.

'People report only when it's socially had an impact, maybe on their particular business or family' (World Café 2, 4).

Many feel the tolerance is genuine in that people do not see cannabis use as a problem, including some parents of users.

'I deal with young kids who are getting letters cos they've been reported smoking the cannabis and everything, and the amount of parents who ring up and just say "how do you know it's them?" Whereas I'd be mortified to say, you know, they're in a group, there's cannabis' (World Café 1, 2).

It is also suggested that there may be age differentials in terms of who will report cannabis use.

'If we get complaints about smell of cannabis, it tend to come from, I would say, [age] fifty plus' (World Café 1, 1).

'There's an age thing, a generational difference. The older people are the first to report it. Younger people are more "what they do in their house is there problem"' (World Café 2, 1).

The impacts of cannabis use in Knowsley

Health impacts of use

The most frequently cited risks around cannabis use are in terms of health. Cannabis use health impacts are thought to include

'Lack of emotional development.'

'Side effects, in particular that it can make you 'paranoid/anxious.'
'[The product not being] natural as has been selectively bred.'
'[Cannabis being] more dangerous for younger people'
'The younger the person, the more it affects their brain development' (World Café, Posters).

In addition to this, the stronger strains of cannabis such as skunk are felt to cause greater mental health issues and even withdrawal effects.

'Everyone who comes into our place is a cannabis user and the first thing they say is the impact it has on their mood.'
'And you didn't get that with the old cannabis because of the CBD.'
'You're talking paranoia...Anxiousness. This is the problem we're seeing.'
'There's also people talking about withdrawal symptoms and you never had withdrawal symptoms with the old cannabis.'...
'Because they've bred out CBD' (World Café 4,1).

There is also a particular concern about the addition of tobacco to cannabis 'joints' and the associated health risks, particularly as this means some who may not ordinarily have smoked tobacco end up doing so.

'It's a dual dependency on the tobacco and on the cannabis. And one feeds off the other' (World Café 1, 1).

Dealer involvement

There are concerns that young people in particular may not understand the longer term social costs of cannabis use, in particular debt to dealers.

'Those things [repaying large debts to dealers] are incredibly scary. And we're still talking about, in effect, kids here. And I think we lose sight of that sometimes. They may be all, they know what they're doing. But they are still developing minds and bodies.'
'They don't understand the consequences do they? They know what they're doing as in "I want to be the big man so I'm going to smoke cannabis." But they don't see the long implications for them. The longer term ruination of their prospects and things' (World Café 2, 2).

Parents of cannabis users are also said to be at risk from dealers to whom their children owe a debt.

'So they come and rob their own crop from you. So they [young cultivators] owe four hundred quid. They [the dealers] are going to knock on your door at eight o'clock at night. They're going to threaten the parents. We've had a few parents in the job I do where the parents have to pay up' (World Café 2, 2).

Criminality and cannabis use: Including violence, aggression and theft

Criminality obviously includes the possession of cannabis itself under current UK law. One participant outlines the levels of criminalisation from drug possession and the usual group who were the focus of police attention.

'At one point a couple of years ago, 20% of all ...crime figures was relating to possession of a controlled drug. And I can tell you that factually. It has been coming down in the last and its anything range from 13-20% ...The age group is predominantly young people, anything from sixteen to twenty five to thirty years of age...It's coming down because people know how robust the police are in detecting cannabis use' (World Café 1, 3).

Criminality is suggested by some to be due to links between cannabis with violence. It is felt that people who have developed a dependency are more aggressive when they cannot get access to cannabis.

'There is violence linked to cannabis. Cocaine and alcohol are linked to violence as well. If we believe in a violent incident drugs have been used we can do a trigger, it's a trigger offence. We can request a drug test in custody. So those types of figures are being monitored as well' (World Café 1, 3).

'It [cannabis use] has an impact on their behaviour. It has a significant impact in terms of the home...We are seeing families at absolute screaming pitch point in terms of the levels of aggression within the home. And families are not necessarily able to deal with that' (World Café 2, 2)

'In a piece of work we did last year we found that 80% of young people coming through the Youth Offending Service were using cannabis and some of those associated issues then in terms of levels of aggression and violence within the home and accommodation breakdown as well' (World Café 1, 3).

'I see an impact on behaviour in young people. Aggression seems to go from nought to a hundred in seconds. I'd put that down to what they're using cos most of them do use, smoke' (World Café 2, 1).

In some cases the use precedes the aggression, violence and problems at home, in others it is a consequence. Either way, in the home, aggression is said to compound what are often already complex environments for young people.

'I'm wondering if the real impact of it is in the home. Relationships. There's violence from young males and young females towards their parents. And that's something that's increase. And obviously that's partly about domestic violence that they're witnessing...but a lot of it is "You're not giving me any money for my pot" and there's arguments about that and through the paranoia and the side effects of what they're smoking, they're much more aggressive' (World Café 2, 4).

'Some of the young people that we're seeing coming through are already coming from environments that are quite difficult. There are developmental, mental health or emotional issues within the family and ill health or bereavement in the family so those young people are already dealing with a lot. And then very often because of their aggression they are then leaving home or been thrown out of home...and you're dealing then with really complex young people and complex issues' (World Café 2, 2).

Parents are also suggested by one participant to be at risk from young people stealing from them in order to fund cannabis use.

'I think it's like the old heroin users when they first started out. Anybody who starts out doing anything like that will first start stealing from the home. It's the first port of call. Because the family won't report them' (World Café 2, 4).

Cannabis use is also linked to general theft in order to fund drug purchases, although this is not a common perception.

'We see a big difference in the crimes with young people doing burglaries. It's like going back to years ago when the heroin addicts did exactly the same behaviour' (World Café 2, 1).

Knowledge of cannabis cultivation in Knowsley

A changing cultivation terrain

A change in the production of cannabis is noted by all groups in that there are no longer thought to be many large cultivation sites/farms in industrial premises due to a shift in cultivation to domestic premises.

'Rather than in the old days where they would mass produce this in derelict buildings...they would do them up to have a mass cultivation, that isn't the case anymore. They're using peoples rooms in individual houses for the growth of cannabis' (World Café, 1,1).

'We think it's very fractured now. It's not great big cultivations. It's more little bits.' (World Café 1, 2).

'I mean years ago you didn't get the cannabis farms. Most of it was imported' (World Café 1, 5).

Incidence of cultivation

The incidence of this domestic cannabis cultivation is difficult to identify. Most respondents say it is underreported, making it difficult to know the true scale. A few say it is much more common now than it has been historically.

'There's been a change. It's very common now' (World Café 1, 2).

'My cases for cultivating cannabis has grown, you know, immensely (World Café 1, 2).

'I don't think we ever really know how many people they [drug dealers] have got growing stuff for them. It's probably a hell of a lot more than what we ever think it is' (World Café 2, 1).

'It's got a lot bigger these days hasn't it?' (World Café 1, 3).

'The majority of my workload is cannabis cultivation now probably. That's been gradually increasing over the last twelve months...About 70% now. I think because the police have got much better at identifying them now' (World Café 1, 3).

Locations of cultivation

In terms of geographic areas, many say cultivation is 'Borough wide' (World Café, posters). That said, similar to cannabis use, most respondents feel cultivation actually happens in 'pockets' rather than in every household in the borough, i.e. that in some areas there are high levels of cultivation whilst there are few in others.

'There are part of certain estates where every other house is doing it...Whilst you can say it's a borough wide problem, you can focus down on certain parts of the borough, certain estates, certain streets...Police information around searches they've done would be evidence of that... If you looked at the North Huyton area you could probably pick out roads...that you'd said "yeah, that's a problem specifically in those areas." And I don't think it's that the police are being particularly 'lookie' in those areas, I think there just is a concentration round there' (World Café 1, 5).

In terms of 'pockets,' Stockbridge Village and Kirkby are specifically mentioned.

Round Stockbridge you're talking about something in the region of about twenty-five plants per room (World Café, 1,1).

'It's certainly more common in Stockbridge' (World Café, 1,1).

'We were aware that there was up to two hundred properties in Kirkby that was potentially growing cannabis cultivation' (World Café 1, 3).

'Anyone can grow it to be fair. I'm based in Stockbridge Village and I work right across Knowsley, and any day in Stockbridge Village you can pick out ten places quite easily in the blocks of flats where people sell' (World Café 1, 3).

Cultivation is felt to take place mainly in rented properties, primarily social housing, though increasingly in private rentals as these attract less police attention.

'Initially we were finding rented properties where all bedrooms were being used [for cultivation] and you were hiring out units and factories and it was large scale where they'd have a room to grow it, a room to weigh it, a room to bag it and dry it. They were paying people to use premises and the business owner would get a cut of that...As times progressed and [the police] have got better at detecting the cannabis cultivations and farms, the growers are now scaling it down. It was about fifty, now it's thirty, now it's anything between ten and thirty cos they know they can get away with the lesser criminal offence of Possession of Controlled Drugs' (World Café 1, 3).

The fracturing of production into smaller farms in domestic premises is said to be primarily motivated by dealers wanting to 'spread the risk' (World Café, 1,1) of the police finding the crops, of the police pressing charges, and of theft of the entire crop. Levels of cultivation vary.

'We've had one that had about ten [plants] in and one that had thirty' (World Café 1, 3).

'Years ago the police used to get factories where there were in excess of fifty odd plants. That's a big loss for whoever's running it and potential custody for anyone who's caught...With it being small cultivations [now] it might be four or five plants it falls within the remit of them saying "it's for my own personal use" and it's just a caution. Someone with previous good character gets a caution and that's the end of it...So they diversify the business so it's harder to tackle' (World Café 2, 1).

Profiles of cannabis cultivators

No profile for cultivators

There is no common profile identified for cultivators. A few participants admit they have no idea who cultivates cannabis and many say it happens in all age groups and all classes with no identifiable patterning.

'It's across the board. Trying to pinpoint each bit like certain gender, certain age, certain type of family, it's just not going to work...cos it is just anyone who will grow it' (World Café 1, 3).

'It's not specific to any one is it?' 'It isn't.' 'I think initially it was organised criminals who were responsible for the huge cultivations...but it's now gone out to Joe Public on housing estates who are either doing it for their own benefit or because they're being coerced to do it.' (World Café 1, 4).

Socio-economic groups of cultivators

Some suggest that cultivators are more often lower socioeconomic groups in social housing, simply to contend with economic conditions.

'Who's growing it? Is there a profile?' 'I think you're looking at particularly the more deprived areas. The traditional high problems, lots of poverty, lots of crime' (World Café 1, 5).

'It's a way of getting a lot of money very very quickly. Once you get good at it, three crops a year's not a problem. Forty thousand pounds for someone who's never had a job! Or even people who have got a job...I think I'm talking myself into growing cannabis' (World Café 1, 4).

'Twenty five plants, people think its work that risk because they think, forty grand, and the police may come through my door but actually what's going to happen to me. There's very little to put people off doing it' (World Café 1, 4).

Others say socio-economic conditions have increased the number of private rentals, with landlords becoming involved in cultivation; some deliberately, some unknowingly.

'I understand though that on some of the newer housing estates...It's a massive private housing estate, as the recession bites and there's more and more mortgage snatch-back, more and more of those properties are transferring from owner occupier to private lets. And the absent private landlord is less inclined to be concerned or know less about what's going on in that property. And that's lots of that cropping up. Nice houses in residential areas being used for cultivation' (World Café 1, 5).

Whilst those in lower socioeconomic groups are said to be more at risk of using, cultivating, dealing and conviction, some of their wealthier, working 'clients' to whom they sell cannabis are said to be likely only to use rather than cultivate, in order to avoid the risk of prosecution. Notably the patterns of use in these groups are said to be more recreational (weekend) than dependent (daily) use.

'The type of information that gets put through to the incident unit...cos the residents are ringing us...the type of people are more upper class that what we might, what people think...They call at teatime Friday to pick up their little stash and off they pop for the weekend and they're out of it then aren't they? It's the people who are left in the homes who pay the price' (World Café 1, 2).

'They [dealers] tell me that their customers are white collar workers' (World Café 1, 3).

'I think the growers and the cultivators are the older people with the money. Your more organised criminals. They will use the younger people to get it out and deliver it and deal for them' (World Café 1, 3).

Gender of cultivators

It is commonly felt that it is primarily young males who end up cultivating, mainly because they want 'kudos' and to gain status with dealers or to pay off drug debts, and that once started, the cultivation is likely to continue as it is lucrative.

'Once they've done that [paid the debt] and seen that it is quite easy money...they'll do it again.

'So they're hooked in then. It's not just a one-off, it's not just clearing the debt'

'If they set it up right, they can turn a crop round every three months' (World Café 1, 2).

Motivation for cannabis cultivation

Finance and structural/economic conditions

The motivation for domestic cannabis cultivation is almost exclusively felt to be financial. For some it is felt to be about greed in that it is 'an easy way to make money quickly,' 'a business,' an 'easy money with little work' and 'easy to grow – a cash crop' (World Café, Poster).

'People realise you know you grow a plant, it takes twelve weeks, you're making £400 from one plant' (World Café 1, 3).

'It's a good business plan if you're willing to take the risk' (World Café 1, 3).

Some suggest cultivation motivation stems from the fact that a number of young men have few social skills or life opportunities and 'their world revolves around their street corner' (World Café, Posters), making cultivation and its potential for providing a job and status an attractive offer. These groups are said to undertake cultivation as they simply want a way to make a lot of money working for themselves and see no legitimate avenues by which to achieve this.

'There's also entrepreneurial people who are cultivating for themselves, selling to their friends and...a cottage industry' (World Café 1, 1).

'I think now you get a lot of young lads who want to be dealers. They want to drive round in the nice cars and have the flash things...so everyone wants to cultivate their own cos everyone wants a slice of the profit'

'They're not all the victims of big bully boys are they. There's just entrepreneurs' (World Café 1, 1).

Some see cultivation as a straightforward response to contemporary social structures, in particular the current economy and state cut backs. Many feel cultivation is most prevalent in higher crime and deprivation areas, the suggestion being that the cultivation is symptomatic rather than causal of social problems.

'I think it's the demand. People expect a lot more in life but they don't exactly have the money' (World Café 1, 2).

'Usually our social skills will mature as our age matures but there are that group of people that smoke and don't.' 'I think a lot of that is down to not being in work isn't it?' 'No aspirations.' 'The economic climate as it is.' 'You get third, fourth, fifth generation unemployed.' 'Their world revolves around that street corner, there's nothing to grow up to.' (World Café 1, 5).

Participants who hold this view often describe cannabis cultivation as a 'cottage industry' (World Café, Posters) which is supporting the day to day living of people where there are few jobs or other legitimate sources of income.

'I know there is the sinister side as we said earlier. But in its purest form it's a cottage industry of...if it was done correctly and sold to your peers...That's the utopia side of it. But that's not the reality always' (World Café 2, 2).

Most feel it is being done to deal with debt – be that drug debts (i.e. with dealers requiring use of a room to cultivate in payment for drugs) or (most often) to repay general debt and subsidise daily living costs such as rent and food. The latter is said in particular to be single mums, those who have been affected by the spare room subsidy (referred to by professionals as the 'bedroom tax'), those affected by budget cuts and restructuring meaning less services are provided and those who have lost their DLA.

'...where there are two bedroom flats, we believe there is a strong possibility that they will use the extra bedroom for the cultivation – as a means of them paying the bedroom tax...we think there will be an increase, we are expecting an increase in cultivation' (World Café 1, 1).

Coercion, vulnerability and victimisation

There are a number of groups identified as likely to cultivate due to coercion. It is also suggested that some people feel they have no other option or are coerced into cultivating.

'I'd say probably fifty-fifty. Fifty are doing it cos they want to do it, for financial gain, and fifty are doing it because...they have no other option' (World Café 1, 3).

'I've seen an increase in more vulnerable people being made to grow cannabis to pay off very small debts' (World Café 2, 1).

'You've got bullying in the home. If a dealer comes in your house and batters you, that's domestic violence. And I have heard, cos I've done some work in Norris Green, of girls being used to pay debts, girls being raped to pay debts. And that is going on today' (World Café 2, 3).

Another example of the coerced group are parents who might grow to try to pay drug debts for their child. It is noted that this may increase the sophistication of cultivation techniques and endeavours to conceal such activities.

'You've got your parents of young males who have built up a drug debt and the only way out of it is to grow it' (World Café 1, 2).

'It's the mother, the older mother, with responsibilities, who need to do it and do it right and not make a mess of it and get the police involved' (World Café 1, 2).

Relatedly, there are many suggestions that cultivators are motivated by vulnerability and a need to protect themselves i.e. they are victims of the production process. Some are in debt and feel they have no other option in order to earn money.

'[Cultivation] is very common now – I think cos people are a lot more skint' (World Café 1, 2).

Others are said to cultivate as they are vulnerable and become the victims of dealers or even unknowing victims.

'There's victims here. Young men who owe money being forced to grow plants and they are very much the victims of bigger people' (World Café 1, 1).

'There are victims here. There's those who'd say they had no choice. They had to grow' (World Café 1, 1).

'The one big reason they give is someone's paid them to do it. Or a lodger moved in, put it in their loft and they didn't know about it...or me sons popped round and kept going in the loft but I didn't know what he's doing' (World Café 1, 3).

Of most concern is the idea that this is drawing those who would not ordinarily involve themselves in criminality into the net, not just in terms of cultivation but a spiral of more serious debt and social problems which raises the potential for more serious crime (please see 'Impacts of Cultivation' section below for more detail).

Lack of role models and the 'glass ceiling'

In terms of social structure it is also suggested that there are only 'poor role models' (World Café, Posters) who are materialistic available in contemporary culture, meaning people are motivated to cultivate as 'a way to get the good life quickly when it might otherwise be inaccessible to them' (World Café, Posters). This is compounded by a sense of people in some areas of Knowsley either believing in or genuinely experiencing a 'glass ceiling' which negates the possibility of legitimate ambitions.

'A teenage girl, I think she's in year eleven, year twelve in school. Very much into sport. Wants to be a sports teacher. The professional says to her "what do you want to do when you leave school?" and she says "a PE teacher". And her grandmother stood next to her says "a PE teacher, you? You're just a girl from Tower Hill, get over yourself." So immediately it's slapped her down hasn't it?' (World Café 1, 5).

Accessibility of equipment, growing capacity and detection prospects

Asked what people cultivated cannabis for (i.e. sole or commercial growth), groups offer a range of responses. Most feel the amount grown by each cultivator is normally more than can be used by an individual suggesting some is usually grown to sell, but the scale of cultivation for selling purposes varies. In terms of capacity for growing, cultivators are said to vary greatly.

'It all depends cos these people, I'm sorry, aren't as sophisticated, so they'll just put them in the window. Then there's some that are highly sophisticated with the hydroponics and they will prosper and be able to cultivate'

'We've seen some very sophisticated cultivations. We've also seen pretty poor ones' (World Café 1, 1).

It is felt that ease and accessibility are important motivating factors in that people can get the information on how to grow and the equipment required from the internet or even the high street.

'I was out in my car the other day and saw a sign that said "hydroponic systems set up here" and it's just out there!' (World Café 2, 1).

'You only have to look at how many hydroponics shops have opened up. Certainly in the likes of Huyton village. I'm not being funny but they're not like renowned for their gardening skills in Huyton' (World Café 2, 3).

For those growing for a dealer, many now supply all the kit if the cultivator allows them to use their home.

Equally, many cultivate as it is considered 'low risk' in legal terms as the money that can be made 'outweighs the risk' (World Café, Posters). However, there is also a concern that amounts seen as deserving of official attention are variable making it difficult for people to judge the extent of the risks they are taking by cultivating. Most people are unsure what would need to be acted upon by the police but there is a general consensus that anything over twenty-one plants will result in a sentence rather than caution

'The CPS are looking at twenty plants for prosecution. But the police are saying if you use cannabis, you couldn't smoke one plant without some of it going off...so there are diverse attitudes in terms of what the criminal justice system are looking at...It's like there's no set rules' (World Café 1, 1).

'I think there are set rules in Liverpool and what you've just highlighted there is that it's about the Proceeds of Crime Act, and the police, it's in their interests to designate say maybe twenty plants as, or less than twenty plants as a cultivation, because then they can proceed under Proceeds of Crime' (World Café 1, 1).

'They [the police] are realising under Proceeds of Crime there's a lot of money to be had from raiding cannabis houses' (World Café 1, 1).

How cannabis cultivation is viewed within Knowsley

Reporting and tolerance of cultivation

Cannabis cultivation is said to be underreported but possibly not to the extent of cannabis use. As with use, the main issue is suggested to be with the prospect of anti-social behaviour rather than the cultivation itself.

'Not unless of course there's neighbourhood issues with particular families. Then it doesn't get reported' (World Café 2, 1).

'Not unless they were getting a lot of hassle' (World Café 2, 3).

Underreporting is linked to community expectations on what the outcome of a report might be. It is firstly suggested that some will not report due to a feeling that the issue will continue even if a particular cultivator is apprehended, as another would take their place, or that there may be a lack of official (police or legal) response.

'The police are doing more, but I think what they're doing, they're doing a lot of raids and things like that, and they're getting good results. But it's a very difficult one to put a lid on I think. Cos there's always someone else who'll take that on' (World Café 1, 2).

'If you live in a local community and you know most of the people around you or you have an idea who's involved in some of this, you will be extremely anxious or worried about actually sharing that information with officials. So I think it's about having enough reason for people to feel safe using this in terms of if they know something is happening, and I think that is very difficult on local communities because in some areas there is an acceptance' (World Café 3, 5).

It is also said that the public who know about it are forced to tolerate it as they dare not report for fear of the consequences, not necessarily from cultivators but their associated dealers.

'There is a normalisation thing but when they tolerate it, they have to. Otherwise they could be run out their houses' (World Café 1, 5).

'I don't think it's the cultivator they fear. I think it's more about the fear of the people higher up. Like I said earlier, the firearms discharges or the petrol bombs that go through people's front windows. That's probably more the reason why people don't report it to the police' (World Café 2, 1).

There are some who feel that, as with cannabis use, cultivation is simply not a problem.

'I don't think people see cannabis, still, as a hard drug. They don't see cannabis destroying communities. With use and cultivation. If someone's cultivating it's like "what goes on behind closed doors." The families that I work with that have been done for cultivating they've never had any payback from the community. The community haven't been, like, up in arms about it. It's fairly, you know, acceptable' (World Café 2, 1).

'In certain areas it [cultivation] is accepted. Cos "so and so down the road has always had it, so what's the problem?"' (World Café 2, 3).

Unlike with cannabis smoking however, most feel that views of cannabis being unproblematic are ill-informed, primarily due to the changing contemporary nature of cannabis and indeed skunk.

'Tolerance may be...Parents are not concerned that their children are smoking "whacky baccy" but not know the content of that whacky baccy. Like the levels of THC...I think there's an acceptance that's possibly based on ignorance' (World Café 2, 2).

'We get parents that say "Well we used to smoke it" but it was different stuff that they were smoking' (World Café 2, 2).

It is also suggested that there is an income-related bifurcation of acceptability and tolerance in that the motivation is tolerated if lower socio-economic groups who have few alternatives cultivate cannabis, whereas more wealthy people are seen as greedy and worthy of reporting.

'I think the empathy is with the reasons behind it...If you're in an estate that's really rough, the community may think "well they've done it for a reason." If you're in a nice leafy suburb, an affluent area, they'll think "Well what have you done that for? Why have they done that? They've got the money. Why do they need it? I think there is an expectation there that "Needs must."'

'When it's a single parent with two children, the kids are filthy, they've got nothing, there's no prospects for them and they do that kind of thing, there's some kind of sympathy for them' (World Café 2, 1).

Some say reports of cannabis cultivation come in primarily from service providers, either because they detect it themselves or because they allow the community to report to them to protect their identity and, relatedly, their safety.

'Tends to be not [reported]. What we get is from bobbies on patrol. Because the cannabis now is being fed with heroin. The irrigation waters been infused with heroin which makes it superskunk. The smell is almost impossible to mask. People walk past. Sniff sniff sniff. "What's that?" And then in passing they'll mention it to someone and it gets passed on. And that's how we will find out. It's not because someone's ratted someone out' (World Café 2, 1).

'They would report it to us at housing.'

'Yeah we get residents who report it and we put it into intel with the police...' (World Café 2, 3).

'We do say to people, report it to us and we will deal with it so your name's not attached to it' (World Café 2, 2).

The impacts of cannabis cultivation in Knowsley

Financial implications of cultivation

As outlined in the 'Motivation' sections above, there are clearly incentives to cultivate cannabis cultivation, particularly for those who struggle to gain employment or earn high wages in the mainstream economy. The 'cottage industry' philosophy says cultivation has a positive impact in economic terms in that it runs like a business to get people out of debt and can help (particularly young) people with few prospects to make a lot of money so they are financially better off.

'I think money. There's lot more money floating around on the black market. Cos obviously instead of getting fifty pound a week on the social they can get two hundred quid a day.'

'Especially sixteen year olds who can't claim. They're not in education or training or whatever then basically their parents don't get any money or income for them anymore. So if they're on income support or benefits their parents are going to turn round and say "You have to get some money if you want to live here otherwise you'll have to go couch surfing"' (World Café 2, 2).

In financial terms it is also suggested that cultivation may cost less in criminal justice costs as it reduces levels of acquisitive crime due to a reduced need for other sources of income and a reduced level of arrests due to the compliance of cannabis users (see 'Links to Upscaling of Criminality and Criminalisation' section below). One participant even suggests that this may be an unofficial reason for *not* targeting the issue.

'If you look at how the crime figures have reduced since there's been an overtly increase in the actual production of cannabis, crime figures have actually reduced. Because it's a profitable enterprise, you know there's a quick turnaround, there's a lot of money to be had and it has actually reduced crime figures so the cynic in me suggests that's why there's not been a lot of money targeted at services' (World Café 3, 1).

Neighbourhood/housing impacts of cultivation

Some feel cultivators are actually the least likely members of the community to have a negative impact, at least on their direct neighbours.

'There's the flip side in that if they're cultivating cannabis next door they're going to be the best neighbours ever. Compared to what you could have. You could have a problematic alcohol user or a class A user who are causing all sorts of problems. Where the likelihood is that if they're doing that they'll keep they're head down. They're not going to want to bring the police to the door. They couldn't be a better neighbour. That's the reality' (World Café 1, 5).

However, a serious implication of being caught cultivating cannabis is the high likelihood of people losing their homes. This is seen as particularly problematic when many of the dealers that cultivators grow for escape such impacts.

'[Cultivation] is a breach of tenancy under ...[the housing trust]...One of the impacts is homelessness. We take a tenancy enforcement against the tenant for doing it or we exclude, say if the parents have been forced into doing it...and we end up excluding the son or the daughter, then they'll become homeless...It's put them on the streets' (World Café 2, 3).

'..They can lose their homes and their tenancy' (World Café 1, 1).

'Around 70% of...cases [in the tenancy enforcement unit] are all dealing with, following cannabis cultivation in the property' (World Café 1, 2).

'The people who are giving them the stuff to grow, who they're doing it [cultivating] for, they're not interested that they're going to lose their home. They're not interested in the mess that it makes' (World Café 1, 2).

The loss of tenancy is compounded in that when re-housed, people have to accept properties that no one else will take, meaning that the cultivation (or, arguably, the 'policing' of it, in the broadest sense) can cause a downward spiral in terms of social problems. Staff are conscious that using tenancy enforcement to respond to cultivation can increase homelessness which in turns has the perverse effect of increasing social problems and criminality. However, in the absence of alternative response plans, they feel helpless to act in any other way.

'That [eviction] is seen as a failure of all the agencies to prevent that happening. But in the end what can you do? You can't keep slapping on the hand can you?' (World Café 2, 3).

Children and families

A number of groups raise concerns about the impact of cultivation on the children of cultivators.

'They don't use their lofts [to cultivate] anymore cos they know the heat comes through the roof and that's scanned by the helicopter...So they do it in the corner of the kid's bedroom in a tent... And the kids just know it's there, "don't touch that," and it's just accepted. So what are they going to learn to do?' (World Café 1, 2).

Equally there is concern for the parents themselves, particularly lone parents, who become involved through debt but end up with much greater problems in terms of safety, child protection and criminal justice.

'When the Matrix dismantling team came and dismantled it...they were so appalled at the safety standards, they made a referral to social care. And this mum, she never been involved with services before, never committed a crime before. She was just in debt. Bills mounted up. And it was a quick way to earn some money. And she did it and got caught...She had a back problem that she believed that cannabis relieved a lot of that pain. But she waited till the kids went to bed. She's very honest about her use. And it was through getting cannabis from these people [dealers] that her debt, her debt was like utilities like water, council tax, she's had a fine for throwing a ciggie on the floor. And she was getting in more and more debt and getting in a fluster. And when she found this other option, they came round and kitted out the whole house for her' (World Café 1, 5).

Social problems, vulnerability and victimisation

Perhaps the greatest concerns are around the vulnerability of many who become involved in cultivating for other people and whose problems spiral as a result.

'I think it makes vulnerable people even more vulnerable. It puts them on the streets. If you have a learning difficulty or are vulnerable because of previous mental health, or anything really, you're a prime target for these kids. Cos if they can get in your house and near your leccy [electric] meter, they can grow their cannabis and what are you going to do? Who are you going to tell?' (World Café 2, 3).

'We see a lot of people who are in debt really because they owe a dealer money... But we also see the other side of it, the cultivation, where someone'll come in with a large electricity bill of five thousand pounds and they live on their own!' (World Café 1, 4).

'We've got a young man who's been evicted and he's now homeless with health problems. And he was paid you know to go with his family down south and stay with his family for a couple of months. And you know...it was like an all-expense paid trip...And when it all unravelled we found out it was true. He had mental health problems and was just vulnerable' (World Café 1, 5).

Landlords are also felt to be the victims of cultivation in some cases, losing thousands of pounds due to property damage.

'As landlords are getting lots of properties damaged. They cut holes in walls to create a farm in a bedroom, garage, loft' (World Café 2, 1).

There are concerns that in particular young people, or indeed their parents and families may become involved in cultivation because they have been manipulated/forced/exploited and that young people 'forget to be a young person' (World Café 2,1) once involved as they lose out on legitimate social activities, education and engagement.

There is also a feeling that perceptions of cultivation have an impact on the general reputation of an area, particularly around Knowsley.

'It is about communities and what people associate with those communities...That's a big impact of cannabis use is how safe people feel in their own communities. And there are definitely areas of Knowsley that have got that reputation...Page Moss, Stockbridge Village. They're renowned' (World Café 2, 5).

Criminality and criminalisation

There are some positive impacts of cultivation identified in terms of reduced criminality, both in terms of acquisitive crime and public order offences.

'You could say the impact of cannabis cultivation is crime reduction. The impact has reduced crime because criminals are earning money this way rather than going out and committing acquisitive crime. Because the people who are buying [cannabis] off them are people who work and have money' (World Café 2, 4).

'It's reduced antisocial behaviour. We've always dealt with young people on the streets in my line of work and when we stop and engage with young people now, they'll have their hands down their pants and they're like "oh whatever" – they're so calm and so polite. Gone are the days when a young person...would challenge you in that way. They used to be abusive and loud, whereas when they're under the influence of a spliff, they're more chilled out, so when the police stop them, they are more compliant. We've notice that with the Public Order Offences. When you look at police data on arresting people for section 4 and 5a Public Order Act, they have come down in my opinion' (World Café 2, 4).

Conversely, cultivation is also said to cause criminality, with theft of electricity featuring predominantly in the discussions of the impacts of cannabis cultivation in Knowsley, alongside the related risk of criminal damage to properties and risk to health and wellbeing.

'Usually when we get a cultivation its theft of electricity as well' (World Café 1, 1).

'The electricity now is dangerous. It can cause a fire. You know it just has such a ripple effect' (World Café 1, 2).

The consequences of this are long term in that meters are removed in these cases, with high costs to have them returned, increasing the likelihood of future debt.

'A meter costs approximately four to six hundred pounds to replace...And if they want it back, that's what they've got to pay' (World Café 1, 1).

The vulnerable individuals described in the previous section are felt to be at greatest risk of the upscaling of criminality, for example those already in debt entering into further debt if the crop fails or is stolen or discovered by the police and/or agreeing for example to hold firearms for dealers in order to pay off debts.

'Not only have you got your original debt but you've lost the stuff that they put in to grow'
'So it could then change to "OK so you owed us X amount of money, you now owe us still that amount of money plus this amount of money. So what I want you to now do for me is just hide that gun.'" (World Café 1, 2).

'These sort of vulnerable people aren't they that are also used for storing stolen goods or looking after firearms. So there's more to it than a bit of weed.' 'It is that link with other crime isn't it?' (World Café 1, 5).

'It's a recognised scam in Liverpool isn't it? I give you twenty plants, say I'm going to give you ten grand. I know exactly the age of the plants so I know when the crops ready. Two days before you're due to crop it I come along and steal my own plants...You now owe me twenty-five grand and a set of plants... I could end up owing you a hundred grand in three months so then I'll grow all the plants you want. You keep me vulnerable in my house' (World Café 1, 4).

'I've got a young lad who started off running the cannabis. They are being exploited are they? It's the other stuff they're doing for them [dealers] like stashing guns or whatever. Its massive links to serious crime' (World Café 2, 5).

In particular, concerns are raised with regard to the increase in criminalisation because many of those convicted of cultivation are increasingly felt to be people with no previous criminal history, particularly those who are young, in debt and / or happen to live in areas where cultivation is thought to be more common.

'People are coming in to the criminal justice system now that potentially wouldn't have done otherwise for any other reason except for this.'

'Something just doesn't sit right when people come in does it, who've been nicked for it? You're going "That's not that person who's done that!"' (World Café 2, 3).

'You've now got the individual who's got no previous form and all of a sudden they've got cannabis cultivation in the house' (World Café 1, 3).

'I don't think Joe Public, normal person, would have that [cultivation] on their...that would never be their thought. Surely they've got to have some kind of involvement in that kind of stuff already?'

'If you live on an estate, and I'm not saying all, but I'm pulling it out of Hillside, whether you're involved in crime or not, you can't tell me if you live on Hillside you wouldn't know someone you could speak to about getting your loft kitted out.'

'So if you come on hard times and you want a holiday...'

'That's exactly what happened to a mum I work with. She was in a bit of debt and she was offered two thousand and she's due up on court. Never ever been involved with anything' (World Café 2, 1).

'Easy access to criminal behaviour, for young men really, who wouldn't naturally go down that route. Possibly being used or influenced. Starts off with a few plants and then grows it...or they get themselves more involved. So there's young men becoming criminals who wouldn't normally follow that path. Particularly young people who have their own tenancy' (World Café 2, 1).

'You're going to have people involved who've never had anything to do with any kind of drugs. Just to pay their debts. Their house will be used to store the end product or to cultivate it. It's quite common now to have people who've not been in trouble before because that's obviously not a place that's going to be targeted by the police or any authorities. You know? It could be a mum with kids... People who you

wouldn't expect are actually cultivating it. Not for their own use or any gain but simply to pay something off' (World Café 2, 1).

There is a lack of clarity amongst professionals about the circumstances under which the police will take criminal proceedings against cultivators and some feel that police responses differ by area, based on different calculations of the value of the plants.

'We had someone with twenty-one plants and they got a caution...Now by the same token, Merseyside police, I got told by a police officer the other day that they are now saying that one plant's street value is a grand...and each one has a thirteen week life cycle. So if you've got twenty-five plants it's a lot of money' (World Café 1, 1).

There is relatively little reference to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) unless participants are prompted to speak specifically on this. In general the topic is primarily raised by representatives of the police or those working closely with them. Other agencies do not appear to make a connection here in that growers are seen as those who grow either for themselves or just sell the goods on. Dealers are the ones seen as problematic. Firstly due to the risk that having dealt cannabis (seen as lower risk dealing), some may move on to cocaine and other higher risk drugs. And secondly because growing is said to be fractured but controlled by OCGs of dealers who have control of specific areas.

'It may seem like it's one lad in his back bedroom and you think well that's not linked to organised crime, but I would suggest that it is. Don't think of organised crime as something that's marketed on a mass scale. It's almost a cottage industry but link all those individual properties together and there's an individual who's directing that operation and its feeding into organised crime' (World Café 3, 2).

The cultivators who are said to be linked to OCGs are subject to increased threats, intimidation and antisocial behaviour and concerns are voiced that such 'gang culture' and 'turf wars' over dealing might increase.

'There is no doubt that there are links between users, cultivators and a lot of the gang feuds where young people are actually being shot' (World Café 2, 5).

'You then get a situation where you've got your gangs in your different areas who each have their own patch...that they're in control of. Like Hillside, or they're in control of Stockbridge Village. But then you might get someone that infringes on another area that then escalates. And you end up then with your firearms discharges' (World Café 2, 1).

'Particularly in Huyton you've got your three or four organised crime groups. Within the Knowsley area. So you may have your Bakers Green estate in Huyton, your estates up in Kirby. And each of those organised crime groups would control a certain estate. If you then get someone coming in and trying to sell drugs on that patch or trying to set up a cultivation in that patch...they won't like that. So they may threaten them or tell someone "go down that road in Kirby and set off a firearm"' (World Café 2, 1).

The OCGs are said to be increasingly knowledgeable of policing methods and resultantly better at evading detection:

'So the hardened criminals know now how the criminal justice system works and they can get away with smaller cultivations...so you'll get the organised crime groups saying "well if I've got you four and you all do thirty" rather than "you all do two hundred each" it's now spreading it. So there's exploitation as they're now exposing more people to risk of crime' (World Café 1, 3).

'Organised criminals won't stay in their own areas now because they know we've done it to death in the last two years. So they will buy and rent properties elsewhere and travel. Organised crime groups are using each other's areas now' (World Café 1, 3).

Health impacts of cultivation

Some health benefits are said to arise from the domestic cultivation of cannabis.

'If it hasn't got to be imported and hidden in other substances then it's actually sort of better standards of it. It's purer. Not like the resin or anything else that's coming over. So that's a benefit. If it is grown in an holistic sort of cultivation way...Its not getting imported in oil barrels or whatever' (World Café 2, 2).

Others counter this however, saying that cannabis, in particular the stronger strains from domestic cultivation, are more dangerous (albeit based on information that is not fully informed around THC levels. See Themes and Conflicts summary chapter for a discussion of this).

'I would counter that – if it's home grown, the THC is *ten times* stronger. It's not got the adulterants in it. But it's still got levels of THC that young people can't...Older people who used to smoke cannabis back in the day won't touch it because the levels of THC for them is far too high...But young people want the highbred strains because that's the levels of THC that they've got used to. So that's the problem with cultivation, is the strength of it' (World Café 2, 2, emphasis added).

'Skunk is a cousin of cannabis. The basic structural difference with it and the reason it's dangerous is, in the old cannabis...you would get levels of *THC around 20-30%* but the plant also grew some naturally CBD which is an anti-psychotic. The skunk that you smoke now hasn't been genetically modified or injected with anything. It's been selectively bred, like roses bred without thorns...selectively bred to increase the levels of THC. They're now running at something between *40 and 60%*. An unfortunate side effect of that and the fact that it's a Semillion [sic] and there's no natural anti-psychotic in it. There's no CBD. The natural plant balanced it out. It got you stoned and it kept you sane' (World Café 2, 3, emphasis added).

This demonstrates the professionals' self-identified need by for more information. There are also suggestions of physical impacts of skunk on the (particularly young) brain which warrant further investigation.

'There is a body of work that the Royal College of Psychiatrists are doing that says that heavy use of this type of Semillion [sic] at a young age, affects the development of the synoptic part of the brain. You can actually see this on brains. So there is a physical effect' (World Café 2, 3).

'Young people don't understand the implications...At twenty one years of age if they want to use mind altering substances, your brain's fully formed. But you're taking that at thirteen, fourteen, your brain's not hard wired. So it's still in the developmental process. And you're using psychoactive substances while those pathways are being developed and that's some sort of passport to future mental health services. It's definitely to do with the levels of THC now and how they smoke it – they put more in a joint now than what most people would do. They buy a twenty pound bag and they make three joints out of that...where previous users would get four five six spliffs out of it' (World Café 2, 2).

An important point made by one observer is that the pattern of cannabis use has changed over time and that this may be responsible for some of the additional health and social issues, rather than an explosion in the strength of cannabis.

'In the sixties, seventies, loads of people used cannabis and went through university. But I don't think young people know how to use cannabis now. And I think that's a shift in drug use. Whereas in the sixties, seventies, you...used cannabis to chill out of an evening or at the weekend in a house. And it weren't as strong as it is now. Whereas I come into work now...and some of them in the college across the road are outside having their morning joint' (World Café 2, 4).

Importantly the policing of cannabis cultivation and use are said to act as a barrier to service access for many people, compounding rather than resolving health problems due to what have become recognised tensions between health and criminal justice objectives.

'From a mental health point of view there's a lot of underreporting and not reporting to protect...because if they do access those services then someone will know they're out there. And it's what is going to happen to them? Are they going to be sectioned? Are my kids going to be taken away from me?...So it's not just about the housing, legal and offending side of it' (World Café 2, 5).

Sources of knowledge on cannabis cultivation

The majority of the professional participants had little direct experience of cannabis cultivation. Knowledge came almost exclusively from work, some having direct experience in the workplace (principally housing, police and some drug worker professionals) but most through second-hand information from colleagues in their own and other services. Few knew about cultivation from personal experience/being around people and/or growing up in or living in the area.

'The most you would hear is on the news, but you do hear a lot about it, about dealing and growing and things like that. But normally it's just...away in houses...[so] you don't know how big that scale is' (World Café 1, 3).

Current and Future Responses to Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Like all drug issues, cannabis consumption and cultivation are complex matters, with multiple causes, people profiles, patterns, motivations, incidence, responses and impacts. This range of factors is mirrored by the skill set of the professionals present at the World Café, each of whom has knowledge specific to their role: Some working with older people; some with younger; some with users; some with cultivators; some from a health perspective; some criminal justice. As a result, *collectively* they are able to provide insights into a broad range of areas of service provision and policy. As *individuals* however, many understandably struggled with the 'crystal ball gazing' session where they were asked to outline their dream responses to cannabis use and cultivation (i.e. planning future policy and services). The range of issues, people and factors involved made this a very difficult task. Many staff feel that alone they simply cannot envisage a complete way forward:

'I really haven't got a way forward. If there's one thing about being here today and my own experience is I haven't got the answers' (World Café 5, 5).

However, triangulating their views and arranging them into strategy areas does achieve the task of identifying a way forward. People consider what is needed from services by reflecting on what is currently available, meaning that the two sets of data are inextricable. In view of this, the data is divided by strategy area (education, advertising of services, service availability and provision, infrastructure (funding and restructuring) and ethos (enforcement, support and legalisation). Within each of these areas, the current capacity of services is considered as well as consideration and identification of what is needed to improve cannabis policy and provision. Each area is subdivided where the discussion and recommendations apply to specific issues e.g. use or cultivation; younger or older people; males or females; tenants, landlords or owner occupiers.

Service availability and provision: Use

Lack of services

There is some disagreement about the availability of cannabis services in Knowsley. Some say there are services available.

'We've got good services in Knowsley, there's good professional support services its people who don't wish to access them' (World Café 3, 2).

'There are loads of services in Knowsley' (World Café 3, 2).

'Knowsley Young Person's Substance Misuse ...they actually come into schools. They come into our school once a week the Substance Misuse Team to work with people either I've referred or the school have or if they're voluntary' (World Café 3, 4).

'This service now which is really good...the Strong Families Service who link into everybody, it's not just about children it's about adults as well' (World Café 3, 4).

'We have a enforcement arm and a support arm, so we have a drug and alcohol worker, we have floating support teams that would also provide help, support and signposting to our tenants who are heavy cannabis users' (World Café 3, 2).

Whilst others say there are no cannabis use services, not least because some do not see cannabis use as an issue.

'My answer is there isn't a service at all in Knowsley that tackles the use of cannabis, skunk or whatever you want to label it...There's no service that I'm aware of... and here's a fella from drugs services saying exactly the same' (World Café 3, 1).

'Until it's recognised as an issue, there won't be a service put in place to deal with it' (World Café 3, 1).

'We have that many patients and they don't know where to turn' (World Café 3, 2).

'I don't think we've got any recognised services to be honest, to respond to cannabis' (World Café 4, 5).

A focus on Class A drug services

Many professionals feel that cannabis use is eclipsed by a funding focus on class A drug users and services which meet their needs. However, some do stress that the demand for cannabis specific services is now increasing.

'Drug services across Liverpool, actually not just across Liverpool, nationally are set up for heroin and crack cocaine and very little else really' (World Café 3, 1).

'Don't treatment agencies provide?'

'They don't get funded for cannabis, they never have' (World Café 3, 1).

'To be fair to drug services, they've never been funded for cannabis. The government's target's never been cannabis...There is nothing effective cos there is nothing...and I think you have to get that out there and say it. It's nobody's priority to be honest' (World Café 4, 1).

'The funding used to come down from the national treatment agency and was about, was double the amount for an opiate than a non-opiate...So to keep your services going is obviously, it reinforced that fact that this [cannabis] wasn't an important issue' (World Café 4,2).

'With drug services now, it used to be your heroin and your crack cocaine...But I do a lot of allocations now, looking at new referrals that are coming in...What you're getting in now is your cannabis use, your skunk use and your prescribed medication from GPs...So I think this areas need to be met head on cos just now it's not a priority' (World Café 4, 1).

I think in the past we've been driven to commission services around particular classes of drugs...So class A. And that was regardless of whether you had a class A problem or not. So Knowsley traditionally did not have a heroin problem, but was more closely linked with the recreational use of cocaine. But the cocaine

one is a massive problem that wasn't being addressed...We didn't commission services specifically around cannabis use'

'I think that's changed now. There's the latest specification, there was a clear drive from across the stakeholders that we need to have a service that covered whatever. Because the other thing is we don't know what new recreational drugs will appear, so it had to be a flexible service' (World Café 4, 2).

'It was the class A that used to get funding. It was the heroin users that were seen that they would pinch your handbag or break into houses. But that's changed now a hell of a lot.'

'It has. I think particularly with the skunk now it is like the new heroin because of what people are prepared to do to get it....There's individuals who will rob their own families...My clients come in and they've been robbed by their own children. From their younger brothers, sisters too – games consoles taken. And specifically for skunk' (World Café 4, 2).

'I don't think it [services] is specific enough. I think it's passed us by in terms of cannabis being the issue. We've previously focused on other drugs and seen this as a lesser evil if you like. I think now's the time to integrate it really with it being the main preferred drug' (World Café 4, 2).

Generic rather than cannabis-specific services

At the heart of the apparent inconsistency about service availability is the fact that whilst there are services available, many are generic, either providing services for a range of social problems (e.g. Stronger Families, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and housing providers) or a range of types of drug use.

'From a partnership point of view...the anti-social behaviour or Stronger Families and other problem-solving groups that we have, we identify people that commit various acts of crime and anti-social behaviour, of which drugs is one of them and...we do signpost them but it's not particularly focused on cannabis so...it's not tailored for those specific needs' (World Café 4, 1).

As a result, professionals appear to be unsure of which agencies remit include cannabis users specifically. Again this is about information flow between services, but also relates to provision for all types of people and all age groups in that services in school are identified but adult services are rarely mentioned, housing association tenants are mentioned but not services for owner occupiers.

'We go to every single high school across the whole of Knowsley and we run a weekly service so if the learning mentors have a concern that somebody is using that cannabis then they can refer them to our service' (World Café 3, 3).

'Young people at school age would use the school nurse and Addaction when they were about, CRI now' (World Café 3, 2).

'The youth service has done some amazing work with their peer education stuff, and they have produced some good resources' (World Café 3, 2).

'[The housing association] have an enforcement arm and a support arm, so [they] have a drug and alcohol worker, floating support teams that would also provide help, support and signposting to [their] tenants who are heavy cannabis users' (World Café 3, 2).

Relatedly, some feel that there are services available for cannabis users but the different referral criteria of the agencies is a barrier to gaining access.

'There's a criteria for everything and if you don't hit the criteria you can't forward them through to it, you can't access that service. You know if you're not hitting it what are you going to do with these people

because your frustrated wanting them to have a choice at least if they want it but you know everyone has a limitation' (World Café 3, 4).

Perhaps due to the lack of information about services for cannabis use, some feel that what is being done is simply not enough, particularly due to the perceived rise in cannabis acceptability and use.

'I'm working with young people sixteen to twenty one and...we have noticed an increase in cannabis use and a change in the culture. It's become more acceptable. So I can only think that things are handled not very well by services' (World Café 4, 1).

'In Huyton and across the district, the number of stops that are to do with cannabis are just through the roof. So...anything that is being done obviously isn't being effective, even if there is anything that's going on... Because it's on the street constantly. I'd say 90% of the [police] stops are cannabis related offences' (World Café 4, 1).

Young people's services

It is strongly felt that, particularly in young people's services, a proactive preventative approach is required, as demonstrated by the Youth Offending Service previously.

'[In] the YOS, what we're focusing on is first time offenders with cannabis use and they're on the cusp of offending behaviour but they don't get criminalised with what's called a Conditional Caution where we jump on that...And I would say that's preventative as well as reactive in the way that we're looking at and plotting potential cannabis use and then trying to educate them and give them strategies to be able to make changes' (World Café 4, 3).

In a number of groups it is suggested that services, even if provided, will not be accessed unless young people in particular understand that their use was problematic.

'Young people don't want to use them, they don't see it as a problem...it's not an addiction, it's not a problem' (World Café 3, 2).

'Most young people don't see their drug use as problematic unless it's starting to impact on their mental health or their financial situation...Once they have some sort of episode, then they or its usually their family will raise that' (World Café 4, 4).

'They don't see the other health risks...I've been doing this for over ten years and the health messages are lost on young people. Like the smoking messages. They just don't see their mortality in the same way' (World Café 4, 4).

'We've got to be realistic. As well as the effectiveness of services we've got to factor in the young person's motivation to make changes as that will obviously influence outcomes...[and] there's various factors that affect motivation: if they've been caught with it; if it's part of offending behaviour; if its affected their parents tenancy...It all depends on what personal triggers, will then affect their motivation' (World Café 4, 3).

'If people wish to engage, yeah, the services are available. But particularly if you're working with young people who don't think it's an issue then they're not effective. But if people wish to engage there's lots of support available' (World Café 4, 4).

This implies a need to assess young people and target services appropriately. That means providing motivational work to engage young people in the process of considering the impacts of cannabis use on their lives. For those who need/want to change then exit strategies can be planned and supported by services. For those who conclude that

their use is not problematic a harm minimisation approach is more appropriate. What people do say is that whoever provides services for young people need to be the correct person; a role model.

'It needs to be someone young people look up to' (World Café 3, 2).

Services also need to follow young people through the transition to adulthood and be holistic, recognising the diverse needs that young adults who use cannabis problematically may have.

'There are gaps in services. I think when they become adults and its voluntary, they're now on a path...And if they're not recreational and they are, they can't move without them, how are they going to go to work? ...Kids, if they're used to cannabis, how are they going to transition into work?' (World Café 4, 4).

Non-stigmatising/confidential services

For cannabis users of all ages it is felt that, whilst they may be experiencing problems, they will perhaps not attend a generic drug service as the problems associated with other drugs are not seen as applicable to them and the stereotypes of other types of drug use make shared services unattractive. The suggestion here is that separate cannabis-only services should be considered.

'A general or common perception, I'd rather be a pot head than a smack head' (World Café 3, 3).

'But I think what cannabis users and young people differentiate between what cannabis uses, from what's drugs users and what's heroin and crack cocaine. So they would be very much "that's not a service for us, that's a service for those people over there, cause were not really drug users in that way"' (World Café 3, 3).

Similarly relating to stigma, services need to be sensitive to the fact that some people may wish to attend anonymously or at least discreetly, in particular this need is identified in the parents of cannabis users, as in the first quote below, but equally for young people, as the second quote demonstrates.

'There's a bit of a stigma as well. The parents don't tend to talk about it because it's seen as a bit shameful. But they're getting more prepared to speak about it now because they know that down their road there'll be another three houses where the child's doing exactly the same' (World Café 4, 2).

'For young people if you had a young person and they were smoking [cigarettes] they're more likely to want to access support and be open and say "I'm smoking and I want to access support. I want to have nicotine replacement and I want to try and quit smoking." But there's still that thing that if a young person says "oh I'm using drugs" or whatever it might be, they might feel that at home with the parents they might say "I'm not having that" or "they'll kick me out" or "they'll batter me" or whatever. So I think them coming and accessing support, they worry about that and what it means and what people'll think of it. So you could do a stand. We do it all the time. And the smoking girls have a big queue around them but nobody'll come and talk to us because you've got that stigma attached' (World Café 4, 3).

'The substance misuse nurse goes in once a week and she is full. Now I refer to her and it's voluntary but if I've got a suspicion then I say "you are going to one appointment at least."...It's all confidential, parents don't need to know and it's important really that that is there for young people' (World Café 4, 4).

Ethos and approach of services

Services also need to ensure that they target needs appropriately to make themselves attractive to service users. This means choosing the correct approach and providing the type of services that cannabis users in particular are likely to need.

'The main aim now is recovery. But young people don't need recovery. They need harm reduction advice and support, not recovery in the same way that adult service would and I don't know whether that's being taken into account' (World Café 4, 3).

'It's probably the way that they actually see drug services. It's not made to look as if it's going to be of any use to them...It's not like there's any kind of treatment there for them. I mean they used to do the relaxation techniques and that, I don't know where you're going to be with that now. We used to do head massages, relaxation and all the rest of it and it's whether they're going to be able to do that in the future' 'We still do that for the YOS but that's again only for our client group' (World Café 4, 3).

Gender considerations in services

In terms of gender few feel that there is a need for separate services for males and females, in fact such siloing is thought to be detrimental as one service may lose track of what another provides and best practice may not be shared.

'Are there specific gendered needs for young people in services?'
'I wouldn't have said so, no' (World Café 4, 3).

'I work with young men and young women and I treat them both the same...I think if you've got separate services it doesn't work...If you've got one service for the females then you're not doing anything for the males. But if you've got them both together you can actually say "what's going on?" and see the interaction that way.' (World Café 5, 2).

'I think it's not about having a separate service for different approaches within the service...Young women are really vulnerable but actually so are young men really vulnerable but in different ways' (World Café 5, 2).

As the second quote highlights, whilst separate services are not seen as necessary, there are some gendered needs identified which might be taken into consideration when planning groups. The first, crucially, is the need for privacy, i.e. to be able to attend without being identified as a service user, particularly for parents and specifically for women.

'If you're a single female parent, are you going to admit any drug use? For fear or stigma and agencies coming in to take your children. I'm sure we're all sitting round this table knowing women with children in their homes who are using on a regular basis and that's how they cope with their life. But would they actually admit that to services?' (World Café 5, 5).

'I think young men use it more but I think women who use it...are too ashamed to go and find help'...
'And that's typical of women who use any drug or got problematic drug use. They tend to have more commitments to children that are in their care and they've got a lot more to lose really by coming forward and admitting that they've got an issue' (World Café 5, 4).

Second is the need to consider potentially gendered patterns of use.

'In terms of the services we provide its cannabis for males and alcohol and cannabis for females as well. So as long as those have been incorporated in that provision, that's the main thing' (World Café 4, 3).

Third is the need to provide a range service provision types and therapies as different people, and specifically different genders, are felt to have different needs.

'The young men who are coming through our service who are most vulnerable are not necessarily going to engage in the same way [as women] in those talking type therapies and actually we need to look at other

ways to engaging young men. And particularly around risk-taking behaviours. Certainly in our experience, cannabis use isn't just one element, it's linked to lots of other risk-taking behaviour and it's linked to more complex issue around their family circumstances and individual circumstances' (World Café 5, 1).

And finally the need to consider gender imbalance in some groups is raised.

'When young girls, females come into our service what I do get a sense of is they're the minority, cos there are a lot of males there. So there is a concern that they may not fit in or they may not want to engage in some activities' (World Café 4, 3).

The need to treat cannabis holistically and structurally

Importantly the need is identified by a number of professionals to treat cannabis use holistically and not focus solely on drugs, which in general are a symptom rather than cause of many of the problems people experience.

'I personally don't think the substance is the issue. I think it's down to will power. I think instead of focusing on trying to get rid of weed and started creating services where people feel more confident about themselves and feel like they've got will power to do what they want in life and not be led by others, I think that's the key thing' (World Café 4, 2).

'I think the link with emotional health is a big one...We talk about lots of our families or in our case young people being vulnerable...[there is] diagnosed or undiagnosed substance misuse issues within families, significant loss, trauma or bereavement and actually I think actually sometimes we're just dealing with the symptoms. And particularly with young people, we're dealing with the fact that they're involved in anti-social behaviour, they're using substances and actually what we need to be getting back to is the fact that these are young people who are just coping. And perhaps in very inappropriate ways. But what is it we're doing to identify what those needs are and where that support needs to come from. So it's actually the emotional and mental health issue that needs to be supported and addressed. Sometimes they are self-medicating but actually people are using for reasons...So practice needs to address wider symptoms and causes not just the behaviour' (World Café 4, 5).

'It's about giving them something else to do as well isn't it? Cos most of these people have got nothing else to do.'

'It's the economic climate. You know, people with no jobs.'

'It's easy to choose something else if you've got something else to do, but what have most of these young people got to choose? So it's alright telling them not to do that but what else have they got to choose from?' (World Café 5, 5).

Service availability and provision: Cultivation

Police and housing lead

A number of people suggest it is principally the role of those who police (in the broadest sense) cultivation who take this responsibility, namely the police and housing professionals.

'There is the police and housing that do, I don't know of anyone else that does respond' (World Café 3, 1).

'Thinking of services as such, it is just the police' (World Café 3, 2).

'Well I know that obviously the police have a dismantling team and they do a lot of work on responding to information they get from the community and from what officers have gone past properties and smelt cannabis at the properties and they respond to that' (World Café 3, 1).

'It's a difficult one really, I would just say the police I suppose but it's all the other services that come along with the police that are recognising that there is somebody cultivating in a property' (World Café 3, 3).

'From a cultivation point of view I think you're looking at your housing associations, they are the people who would respond to cultivations' (World Café 3, 4).

'And on the back of the warrants that the police do they ask the likes of housing services to bring their tenants in, the tenants who are responsible for those properties are brought in to the housing office and they are interviewed and are advised they are of course in breach on tenancy for having cultivation in the property then our team address the private landlords' (World Café 3,3).

'Basically I might talk to [my colleague] and say I've just been past a flat and smelt the cannabis and there may be a farm there so to get in touch with the police and they set up what needs to be set up and that's their role now. My role's done in simple terms; I've just passed the information on' (World Café 3, 5).

'[The police] provide the landlords with a pack of information on how to spot cannabis cultivation, [they've] got scratch and sniff cards, and now issue the landlords with them to give them an idea of what they are looking for really' (World Café 3, 1).

Importantly, concern is expressed that without a coordinated, recognised strategy, needs may not be met or issues overlooked.

'I think there is a thing of assuming somebody else is going to deal with it whereas actually we all have a responsibility and we all may have information or we may all understand about what's happening in our community but it's what we do with that' (World Café 3, 5).

Stronger Families input

On a few occasions Stronger Families is mentioned but the nature of and admission criteria for their work do not seem to be common knowledge.

'[Stronger Families] work with families if there was drug use or debt, so that's one of [their] criteria's, so if that person had cultivated and that person was a parent and they had other issues going on, [they] would accept a referral for that family and work with them' (World Café 3, 1).

'[There are] parenting family liaison supporters they're called that will come and engage with the parents and carers and they have come across and respond to cannabis cultivation and support the parents and the carers with regards to what is going to happen to them legally in that area and be an advocate really for them to be able to have a voice' (World Café 3, 3).

'Stronger families...it's one to one support for the families, so they do things like; say for example if the young person is the one into using or maybe into cultivating, they might have a parent and support classes, to give parents the knowledge to be able to implement boundaries and to deter the young person away or if it was the other problem and it was the parents that were being irresponsible there would be that support there for the young person and then obviously there would be the referral into treatment services for adults and children, which would be the Knowsley Integrated Recovery Service ' (World Café 3, 3).

Lack of service awareness

The lack of knowledge around these services is demonstrated by suggestions that no work is done around cannabis cultivation, or at least that no services have the specific responsibility for responding to the issue. This highlights that even when services exist, without knowledge exchange, professionals may simply be unaware of the activities of other agencies.

'Not to be disparaging what anyone does and it's easy for me because I sit and look at the research and speaking to people but nobody actually does anything about cultivation and cannabis in the community, honestly it may not be a popular view but it is the absolute truth' (World Café 3, 1).

'I don't know much of services to be honest' (World Café 3, 5).

'Personally I didn't know there were any services available for cannabis cultivation' (World Café 3, 5).

'Not a clue' (World Café 3, 5).

'I didn't know anything about it' (World Café 3, 5).

'In the mental health side of things, no, we know a lot about use, we know a lot about services that will respond but not about cultivation. I knew nothing about the police involvement or anything before now' (World Café 4, 2).

Good practice

On a number of occasions, the police 'shop front' is mentioned, where it appears that people were able to go and ask questions and receive information on cannabis cultivation. Most feel that this has been an excellent education channel and done much to stimulate public interest and knowledge.

'The police were talking in their presentation about setting up... I'm not sure if one was in Kirby at the time but a local set up in a shopping centre or somewhere where you have got lots of people and showing what a cannabis plant would look like' (World Café 3, 5).

'I do recall the local PCSO's setting up a shop in Huyton village for basically cultivation, paraphernalia, they had little cards, I can't remember off the top of my head what number they had on but that was interesting because people were walking past and having a little look.' (World Café 3, 3).

Advertising of services: Use

Lack of service advertising

As demonstrated in the 'Service Provision' section above, some professionals are aware of services which cannabis users can access (albeit that these are not specifically focused on cannabis). However, a large number of professionals say they are unaware of anything or how to access such services.

'I don't know any services that they can access' (World Café 3, 3).

'We only know about the ones at school' (World Café 3, 4).

'I don't know of any agencies where I could refer someone to specifically for cannabis' (World Café 3, 4).

'I don't think there's anywhere for the public' (World Café 3, 4).

'There is no ASK or Addaction' (World Café 3, 4).

'Let's be honest, what's our knowledge of services? There are not many services available to my knowledge. We're very good at working in partnership and we can signpost people for education training, unemployment, housing, community, mental health and safeguarding and stuff like that but beyond that

what community voluntary groups are out there other than the YOS and Substance Misuse workers? What is there that we can make referrals to? And we don't share data or information with these people either and we don't even have their leaflets to say...ok you've been stopped by the police today or you've been given a caution or what does YOS have to say to this person...you might want to get in touch with this group' (World Café 3, 4).

'We're not going to know about it unless it's advertised or there's a campaign' (World Café 3, 5).

This suggests a need for advertising and/or further information sharing on service availability and it is suggested that advertising opportunities, whilst available, are being overlooked.

'In Knowsley we don't use the magazines, the Knowledge, and the challenge to promote services' (World Café 3, 2).

Advertising and information-sharing needs

This suggests that as well as working on service provision, it is crucial to find ways of informing professionals and the public across Knowsley what is available in the borough.

'Advertising's a massive issue and marketing. From the substance misuse nurse and out team, from the NHS there was never any funding for it, it was always word of mouth. Whereas if you've got money and you're charity led, I think you're good at advertising' (World Café 4, 2).

It is also clear that agencies need information on what is available, for whom and from whom.

'I don't think it can solely be put on [drug agencies] should. You might not know about my service, I don't know about your service. I think it's about collectively us all knowing...how do we know about you and how do you know about the drug services' (World Café 4, 2).

'As professionals we will go and look...but you can never keep up to date with all services that are out there, because they go and change all the time. But I think we should know in adult services, you know, what's happening in young people's services and young person's services know what's happening in adult services' (World Café 4, 2).

The way forward: Information, a multi-agency approach and clear lines of responsibility

In terms of a way forward it is clear that a multi-agency approach is required to tackle cannabis use and that agencies need information on what services are available, clear lines of responsibility and admission criteria, i.e. who has the remit for which elements of intervention and for which groups (by age, gender, tenancy and so on). This data could usefully be stored on the council website so that both the public and professionals are aware of what is available and for whom. Such a database needs regular updating to keep all interested parties abreast of changes to involved agencies.

Advertising of services: Cultivation

Lack of awareness/advertising

Apart from the police, housing and Stronger Families, most professionals are not aware of any services with direct responsibility for cannabis cultivation or who can provide services to those involved. Again, some of this is in part about a lack of specific provision but also about a lack of advertising.

'I think there's quite good service available if you wish to access them.'

'But the community need to know and have that information...They should be put into the local papers and stuff because it's not widely publicised' (World Café 4, 3).

'This question of the effectiveness of services – there's nothing out there saying "we're doing this, we're doing that"' (World Café 4, 1).

It is also suggested that the issue of cannabis cultivation is perhaps unspoken in public forums and advertising deliberately, due to a desire to conceal the issue. A number of staff feel that the need to promote Knowsley as a 'Borough of Choice' sometimes eclipses the need to deal realistically with social matters which need attention.

'I think we should use our local papers, in terms of The Knowledge, or The Knowsley Muse...Cos in a way if it's not put out in the public domain to pick up and read then we're almost colluding, like "don't speak about it." So it should be out there to say "this is support systems, this is what to do." And I don't know whether that happens in Knowsley' (World Café 5, 1).

The way forward: 'Potline'

It is suggested that in terms of a way forward for service provision and the policing of cannabis, there should be a line similar to CrimeStoppers which people can contact anonymously and which professionals can contact in order to get information on appropriate responses and agency responsibilities.

'You could do with a hotline, a potline' (World Café 3, 3).

Education: Use

Education for professionals: The scale of the issue

Education both for the public and professionals is seen as the backbone of responses to cannabis use.

'It's all about education' (World Café 3, 4).

Professionals say they are aware of higher levels of cannabis use (as previous sections demonstrate) but some highlight that they are not sure of the extent to which this use is problematic, something they feel they need to know in order to be able to respond appropriately to the issue.

'A recording and monitoring system to monitor the numbers and instances that do crop up in the area. We need an idea of, proper figures so we can see how much of an issue it is and...the demographic of those people' (World Café 5, 1).

Importantly, definitions of what is problematic and how this is assessed need to be considered carefully when educating both professionals and the public. To over-identify problematic cannabis use can infringe on human rights and waste valuable resources through undue criminalisation and unnecessary service intervention. To under-identify can leave people without access to the services they need.

'Who's defining what's problematic is an issue...Certainly we started to look at young people who'll say it's not a problem...But we started challenging our service saying "Well who's defining what's problematic? Are you talking to families?" Because when we started talking to families, families tell us about the levels of aggression and violence, the levels of debt, about, you know, the antisocial behaviour, who is coming to the door, some of the anxieties and the fears...And I think that's an issue' (World Café 5, 1).

Education for professionals: Up-to-date and accurate information

In most services, professionals express concern about their knowledge being out of date; some said deliberately, some felt through lack of contemporary information and education.

'A part of the problem again is people don't want to know how bad it is because they will have to respond to it' (World Café 3, 1).

'Before I started with the families I would start by educating the staff' (World Café 3, 1).

'We're trying to do our best with what little tools we've got, you need education' (World Café 3, 1).

There are also some clear education needs demonstrated by misconceptions about the possibility of providing services for cannabis users due to the lack of medical substitutes.

'As we all know, there's no substitute with cannabis. With heroin, with crack there's always a way round it. There's methadone, subutex... but for cannabis, what would you replace it with? So it's very difficult' (World Café 4, 1).

There is particular concern about the contemporary stronger strains of cannabis, namely skunk, and well founded concerns about the lack of education and understanding about its immediate and long term impacts.

'Educate your front line workers. What is the actual drug? Are we talking about cannabis or are we talking about skunk?' (World Café 5, 3).

'The issues are is that people don't understand the risk' (World Café 3, 4).

'Even professionals say it's only weed' (World Café 3, 2).

'I think that awareness raising needs to be there for professionals. I think there's a lot of dismissal...like "it's something I did when I was at uni, what's the big deal?" and that kind of response from people' (World Café 5, 1).

'People have this perception of it being pretty chilled out but it's not, people are getting really messed up on it' (World Café 3, 1).

'As services we haven't caught up with the fact that there are impacts from cannabis and it's not just a case of "it chills people out and it's not really a problem." Actually levels of motivation, emotional and mental health, education and training. All of those things are then an issue...And if you're working with a family who may be second or third generation in terms of using or not being involve in education or training, they're not necessarily going to identify it as a problem either. So it's about raising that sort of awareness really' (World Café 5, 4).

'The difference in how stoned they are...you know the cannabis of old days where there was a level of functioning, there's not now is there?' (World Café 3, 1).

'They're our guinea pigs, we don't know what their impact on their mental health will be in 30 years' time, because this is the first sort of generation that are smoking this strength of skunk at such a young age on such a massive scale, which will have a massive impact on the mental health system in the future' (World Café 3, 1).

'I think there has in Knowsley over the years this level of tolerance, not only in the community but with services as well; you know... cannabis has been seen as no worse than drinking, or it's no worse than using it for medicinal purposes or whatever else, so there has been that justification and I don't know that

people necessarily get that it has changed and the impact of it has changed. I think it's about information and I think it's about being proactive about what the impact of it actually is' (World Café 3, 5).

Again, some of the comments in this area are part truths and some complete misconceptions. Examples include misinformation on the lineage of skunk; the idea that skunk is not cannabis; and that cannabis is cross-bred or contaminated with stronger, more expensive drugs to make it more addictive. This further highlights the need for training and education.

'We're all sitting around talking about cannabis but you can't buy cannabis in Liverpool and nobody's scored any cannabis in Liverpool for over five years, because it doesn't exist in Liverpool anymore. Skunk is not cannabis; it's a completely different compound but we call it cannabis and we think of it like the hippies do' (World Café 3, 1).

'It isn't cannabis anyway; it's not part of the hemp family, it's part of the Semillion [sic] family which is a cousin, but it's totally different chemically and genetically than cannabis' (World Café 3, 1).

'I think for the services to be right they've got to recognise that the stronger cannabis itself isn't addictive but it does get laced with stuff that is addictive. That's how the dealers will get their people to come back' (World Café 4, 2).

Education for professionals: Credibility

The main concern is that a lack of education can result in a lack of credibility with service users.

'These agencies are so far behind the users that it's lost its credibility' (World Café 3, 1).

'The training provided to professionals around this is a massive issue really in terms of effectiveness. If we've not got a basic understanding of it, how can we target and be effective? ...We've gone through the groups today and found out it's not cannabis we're talking about...We're having conversations that young people, older people might be looking at us thinking "what planet are you on?" basically which is going to have a massive effect in terms of effectiveness and them even wanting to have that conversation with us...Services are going to be targeting the wrong thing, funding is going in the wrong direction...The people who are using it could inform all of this really' (World Café 4, 5).

'If you want to engage anyone who uses any form of drug then they will very quickly get on to the fact that any staff haven't actually got a clue, they will see through that in around four minutes at which point you've lost them' (World Café 3, 1).

'They know that you don't know what you're on about, instantly they know. So there won't be effective intervention, you'll get great drug workers doing great things, individually. But what about they can only take on their case load, what about everybody else who's not on their case load?' (World Café 3, 1).

'The hardest thing about this is young people know far more than me, I don't have the kudos in their environment' (World Café 3, 2).

Education for professionals: Good practice

It appears that there is some good practice in this area of professional knowledge building and education, in that some services are beginning to gather such knowledge from those who know most about its consumption i.e. users themselves. This knowledge is something which could usefully be shared amongst agencies.

'As usual the drug users are way ahead of services because they know fully understand what this stuff is and they know this isn't cannabis and were two, three years behind' (World Café 3, 1).

'We have a lot of service users that work with us now because we need that minor information' (World Café 3, 1).

Education for young people: 'Scared straight'?

In terms of what form education for young people should take, there are a number of lessons from the past in terms of what does not work, namely the 'Scared Straight' approach. Some people are unaware of the failure of such approaches as these quotes demonstrate.

'It starts with education...Like what was done in the eighties for HIV when that became relevant – I think it needs that push equivalent to now in my opinion' (World Café 5, 2).

'It's hard to get them to engage. Even if you've got them there, to get them to make some changes, their motivation is...'

'It comes back to what we said previously, they don't see there's a danger there, they don't see it as damaging'...

'Exactly. School has got to be more, not making it all airy fairy, they've got to be hard on with the facts. And sort of, like HIV, everybody was terrified. And maybe they need to make it more...'

'Scarier!'

'In my experience, that HIV stuff was awful, it was damning!'

'But it got the message across!'

'I don't think it got the right message across though!' (World Café 5, 2).

However, as the final contributor demonstrates, some professionals are more informed and realise that this approach simply does not work because it lacks credibility with young people as it essentially misinforms on the reality of risk and fails to take account of young people's extant knowledge and experiences of drug use and risk management in general. As a result over-emphasising risk in 'scared straight' type 'education' fails to be meaningful.

'Years ago ...a lot of young people if you'd say to them heroin kills you and they'd say well not it don't because my uncle George is still alive' (World Café 3, 2).

'The shock horror doesn't work; it's about open and honesty' (World Café 3, 2).

'It's also about how meaningful is the message to them' (World Café 3, 2).

'If you have messages for young people that are "It's going to kill you, it's going to do this," they're not interested. It doesn't relate back to them, to their situation, their families and what matters to them. They've got very little out there, it's crap for them. But they've got weed. It chills them out, it makes them feel part of the community, it gives them kudos, it gives them meaning. And that's why you've got to shape the model for them' (World Café 5, 2).

Education for young people: Early intervention

People are keen for drug policy to follow the lead of sex education, in terms of getting to young people as early as possible to provide preventative work in school.

'The intervention should be education in the schools. Before they have the transition into secondary school. Because they'll have older siblings who are already normalising it for them...By secondary school, if it's not already in the home environment then its definitely coming across in the school environment because they're all using it' (World Café 4, 4).

'That there's be early intervention and good intervention with year sevens, year eights, year nine's where people are tending to start making their own marks' (World Café 5, 2).

'The schools have got a big role to play...Ten and thirteen year olds at the moment, I think that's the group we need to be working on. Cos that's wherein lies the danger...'I've just gone into the big school, I need to be part of that gang, I want to fit in so I'll do what they're doing so I'll play out and hang around with them. They're sucked into it before you even know. So parents and the school, I think a much stronger emphasis needs to be put on them' (World Café 5, 2).

That said, there is concern that this might meet resistance, both in terms of schools and parents accepting the need for appropriate (i.e. harm minimisation) messages as that they may not wish to acknowledge that their school has such issues.

'Do you think there might be an issue in schools, you know like with drug education...like "You're giving them ideas." I wonder if that might be a barrier that we'll come up against?'

'Some schools won't take this on. If you go in and you're talking about drugs or sex education or whatever it might be, then their school's seen as got a problem with that, and they don't want to be associated with that.'

'They don't want to talk about harm minimisation, it's just zero tolerance, that's it' (World Café 5, 2).

Education policy needs to focus on is likely outcomes. Hiding issues results in a lack of knowledge which is highly likely to be more dangerous than the provision of information and the equipping of young people to make informed decisions. Where this does not happen, a void is left which can be filled with uninformed and indeed dangerous information, as this quote vividly illustrates.

'My kids are getting an indirect education in school. It's a Liverpool school and they're well aware of, learning that such-and-such a school turns a blind eye cos they can't really control it, it's a massive school. But they know the whole jargon, the whole thing, and it's... they do see the use and they do see the bullying and the dealing and that they've got the best gear on. And they [my kids] make a value judgement not to do that. But you've got the vulnerable kids who haven't got the savvy to do that. So maybe the classroom isn't the best place from it. They learn from their peers'...

'But in school it's a controlled environment.'

'Cos if we don't talk about it that's when all the myths come in and they pick up wrong information' (World Café 5, 3).

Education for young people: The right message delivered by the right people

It is noted that education for young people needs to be available, regular and sustained.

'I left school this year and the closest thing we had to meetings about cannabis and that was an hour lesson. Once in school. There wasn't anything available in schools' (World Café 4, 1).

'There is your young people's nurse going into schools...But you've got missed opportunities as well because it isn't really structured well...A lot of people do go in...But there's no proper plan in place. If you're working with a young person in school or college, when it comes to the school holidays you've lost that person' (World Café 4, 1).

It is also clear that education intervention needs an appropriate ethos and delivery by the right people. There is some discussion about whether or not the police are the correct agency to deliver such messages, particularly in view of their enforcement commitments which can make it difficult to offer an holistic or harm minimisation approach.

'In ...[a local college] they had the police come in and talk to them and give them feedback on the risks because they thought there might be a risk in the college of more and more people taking drugs on site.'

'But is that the police service's bag? Or is it drug service's bag? Or is it a joint venture?'

'The thing with the police is, are we a service? We're not, we're an enforcement body...' (World Café 4, 1).

An enforcement approach and a focus on the long term risks of cannabis use can be problematic. In short, young people do take risks as this is how they learn what is possible in the world, a learning method developed early in childhood, meaning the role of drug education is to make such decisions on risk-taking a balanced and considered test of what their preferred course of action should be.

Education for young people: Good practice

A number of examples of current good practice in education are identified which appeal to the creativity of young people and are diverse in their offerings, allowing the students to undertake the medium that appeals most to them.

'It [drug education] doesn't all have to be classroom. I know a few years ago I was involved in a programme and we used beat boxing, we used drama, we used writing songs, who used a whole creative, different medium for doing the education side of things. The stuff they were actually coming up with to develop their own plays, the songs, etc. it was just fantastic (World Café 5, 3).

In particular, peer mentoring is suggested as a useful way to get young people to listen to, discuss and debate information on cannabis use.

'I'd like to see more peer mentoring. To have the young people who've been involved in it go into schools and say "look, this is where I'm at." That's something that should be explored. They should be the ones going into the school really' (World Café 5, 2).

Importantly, the messages given and the information discussed with young people needs to focus, at least initially, on tangible, immediate or at least short-term impacts as this is the time frame in which young people are more likely to live in and be able to conceptualise. Longer term risks about the future do not feel realistic or likely enough to outweigh the current gains, as this quote from a previous school educator demonstrates.

'I used to do the education stuff, I used to go into schools...A lot of the time you could go through the risks of what might happen, but a lot of the time it was the stuff that was happening here and now. They would be like "oh well, that's in the future that's not going to happen to me" kind of attitude. It was more dealing with the fact of what's happening with you now. Like they says "it calms me down, makes me less angry" and you say "well actually it's going to have the reverse effect. The more you use, the likelihood is that you're going to get more angry' (World Café 5, 3).

Also crucial is the fact that education needs to be realistic in terms of acknowledging what young people currently have, do not have and the benefits they currently see in using cannabis. This suggests that education needs to be a conversation or an exchange rather than a 'fact' giving didactic. It also suggests the need for a holistic approach in terms of structurally meeting needs and providing attractive services and opportunities for alternatives to cannabis use which many young people either do not see or indeed do not have.

'At a structure level education may in fact not need to be specifically about drugs but about opportunities and training programmes and applied education and jobs. 'When kids are coming out of school they need to make it easier to get more jobs. And that's got to be the government. They've got to put more into it, more initiatives for them. To do something that's going to lead them away from doing the drugs and that' (World Café 5, 3).

'I think we need to make some of the services more attractive. You know, when you're trying to get some of the teenagers in to like drug services, they're not interested. There's got to be some kind of attractiveness that draws them in' (World Café 5, 2).

Education for adults

As with young people, adults are seen as in need of education. Both in terms of helping them make their own decisions and to support them in responding to the activities of their children.

'The government need to be getting messages out that it's still class B and there's sanctions that come with that, because people just think it's acceptable.'

'I think the changes though in classifications has made it difficult for people.'

'It's confused people.'

'They're not sure whether it's illegal or it isn't illegal' (World Café 4, 1).

'The message about cannabis and its long term effects, I don't think we're getting that message across. Because some parents are not alarmed at their child's use of cannabis cos they're thinking it's the drug that it was in the sixties and it isn't. The nature of the drug has changed. And the nature of the law has changed. Proceeds of Crime Act and all those things, the longer term effects of getting in to crime. And I think there's a lot of kids who wouldn't go down the crime path who are going down the crime path because of cannabis use and I don't know how we can get that message across of the dangers of the cannabis now' (World Café 4, 4).

Education: Cultivation

Lack of education around cultivation

It seems that currently, a large number of services (particularly those outside of the police and housing) have little in terms of education around cultivation, either for themselves or to offer to their service users.

'I've got to be honest...until today I knew nothing about the cultivation side of it. So you've got to educate professionals before they can actually move on and take things forward' (World Café 5, 3).

A number of education needs around cannabis cultivation are identified both for the public and professionals, including clarifying the law, advice on identifying and reporting cultivation, and harm prevention/minimisation information with regard to the (mis)use of electricity, debt risks, fumed, exploitation and social repercussions.

'But there needs to be awareness raising for the community of the dangers, not just for the use but the cultivation and what you're potentially doing to the other people who are in the house who aren't anything to do with that cultivation and the dangers to the fabric of the house itself because fires could easily take place and the dangers of that could be fatal' (World Café 4, 2).

'I think there's a gap. One of the key things you want to do is raise awareness of the issue. If you go into the communities where that issue is all around them every day, and the perception can be "oh it's only a bit of weed." But it's something that is actually tugging at the fabric of that community' (World Café 5, 1).

'Professionals and the different age groups in the community, young people, adult, need that awareness. Easy access to who they can contact for help. And like the person who lives next door and can't quite figure out what that smell is...that type of thing.'...

'I would agree.'

'Yeah. Demystify the harm, the effects and the consequences' (World Café 5, 1).

'You need a push from government on "that's the classification and the consequences of growing or using or being in possession of cannabis or allowing your property to be used are this"' (World Café 5, 2).

'You've got the older people who've got the money who are setting up the younger people to cultivate for them. The older person has none of the risk...It's the older generation exploiting the youth.'

'So again it's about educating young people about that actually when this is happening to you, it's not a good thing. You're being exploited' (World Café 5, 2).

The focus groups often suggest that a common strategy, recognised by all agencies would be useful. As with cannabis use, it is noted that, particularly professionals, need an accurate idea of the scale of the issue of cultivation in Knowsley as well as a clear map of what the response to this should be i.e. who should be involved, what they need to do and who has responsibility for the strategy.

'What we need first is to understand what our current response is at the moment...So in order to answer that [what cultivation responses should look like] we need to know what it is in the first place!' (World Café 5, 1).

Good practice

In terms of education about cultivation itself, the police 'Cannabis Shop Front' is again highlighted as good practice in terms of engaging the public and indeed professionals in an informal but informative way. People seem much more receptive to information that is given in a way that generates genuine interest rather than feeling imposed.

'One of the shops in Huyton had a shop-front set up with all the hydroponics. Was it last year that? And people were just walking past having a look. It was an education thing. So maybe more of that. But I don't know what the research and the outcomes from that were. Cos police officers were stood outside...I'm not sure if it was a police initiative. But it was quite good cos all the generations were going "oh right" and, you know, having a chat with them.'...

'So what does a cannabis plant look like? Cos we're all professionals sitting here but if you just work in a bank, how do you know? You need this better education' (World Café 5, 3).

Similarly police presentations are highlighted as useful.

'The police have come into our service and did a really good presentation around their experiences of dealing with cultivation and how they are responding, so how they were working with community and areas of the community around cultivation. So some stuff around hydroponics and dealing with the garden centres in terms of places that would actually supply the equipment also in terms of information about what people needed to look for, in terms of once the plants have been disposed of so tipping out loads of pots that kind of stuff...things around smell, activity that sort of thing' (World Café 3, 5).

Notably, the police initiatives around the legal aspects of cannabis cultivation are the only education services identified for professionals and the general public. This is a concern both in terms of the need to cover all aspects of education around cannabis cultivation including social, health and legal (not all of which are the remit or specialism of the police) and the capacity for agencies to continue with preventative work such as this (as outlined in the Infrastructure section below).

The need for a structural approach

At a more structural level, as with cannabis use, it is suggested that education around cannabis cultivation is likely to fail unless people, particularly young people, have realistic alternatives. That means working both to help people identify opportunities outside of cultivation as a means of income as well as stimulating the reality of such opportunities by providing training courses, employment and support.

'You're never going to succeed with all of this unless you can make dealing and selling less attractive to these young people...Young people, you see them, have two options. It's get up and go to work and strive to have the nicest things. Or sell a few bags of weed and get the nicest things' (World Café 5, 2).

'It's the economic drivers that's the biggest obstacle to actually address this issue. Because if you've got people who are sixteen year old who can't claim any sort of benefits and can't get jobs, they're either going to become couch surfers or they're going to become entrepreneurs and start selling weed for somebody' (World Café 5, 5).

Infrastructure (funding and restructuring): Use

The need for stability

For both use and cultivation services there is a need identified for stability i.e. financial support for strategies that are demonstrated to be effective. The main concern here is that the preventative elements of services are lost in times of austerity.

'What the government are doing with all these cutbacks in services is cutting back the 'luxury' element of your job. The partnerships we've built up as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with all the cuts we are only going to become a reactive body and do the bare minimum. So all your research and what you're getting from us now and all what we know about how to go to the next level, we're being impeded by cuts. Our time's now more important so we're becoming reactive again. And that's the danger of where all this is going' (World Café 5, 2).

It is also clear that the consequence of instability has indeed been the loss of some promising initiatives. The previously mentioned programme which incorporates beat boxing, drama and more creative mediums for example is described as being 'just a one-off cos there wasn't the funding to continue it' (World Café 5, 3).

Infrastructure (funding and restructuring): Cultivation

Changing and losing services

As with cannabis use, a great deal of concern is expressed at the recent changes in service provision and the potential loss or reduction in service provision.

'We've just gone through a period of change in a minute in our service, we've gone from being our own kind of service to an integrated service and the likelihood is that those clinics in schools are not going to continue anymore' (World Café 3, 3).

'I think that's the problem the funding of things, they pop for so long and then they saturate and then they don't meet the criteria or they pull the funding anyway' (World Café 3, 4).

'We've just commissioned a new drug service and working with cannabis has got to be a big part of what they do. But we are actually in week three' (World Café 4, 2).

'It's a difficult time at the moment because it's just going through a massive restructure...'

'For the young people's services particularly we think there's going to be some cuts to jobs so we don't think we can hold the same type of caseload that we've previously held' (World Café 4, 3).

'I think we're heading for a tsunami... reduced services that are targeted where we don't actually want them to be targeted' (World Café 4, 3).

'We had the DAT [Drug Action Team] and that's gone, so it's very much now organisations and people working on their own, not without an aim but without a common aim' (World Café 4, 3).

There are great concerns that amongst the changes, some important services will be lost, in particular preventative young people's services, whose impacts are more difficult to demonstrate.

'Previously we had a tier three service and the YOS [Youth Offending Service] would see tier three young people where a risk had been identified. But then there was the Youth Service which had their own dedicated misuse team, so they would go in and do all the prevention work in schools, and sessions and, you know, really promote the service and do all that stuff. The Youth Service have now been disbanded, that team's been disbanded so it's a generic team and they don't do that work in schools anymore. So our service started kind of picking that up because we did have an officer didn't we within Stronger Families team and again that was disbanded and made into a generic role. So our team started picking up some of that preventative work in schools but obviously with the changes that are happening we don't think that's something that has been factored in...So the services is now becoming a reactive service' (World Café 4, 3).

'There used to be a specific substance misuse service in the Youth Service, the Substance Misuse Team that used to go into school and do all that preventative work for that age group in particular. With the cuts that have come in, that team within the Youth Service has disbanded, it's now a generic team and they haven't got the capacity to go into school and do that promotion and prevention work' (World Café 5, 2).

Ethos (enforcement, support, legalisation): Use and cultivation

Deterrence and enforcement

A bifurcation is highlighted in the focus groups in that cannabis use tends to be dealt with by support whereas the response to cultivation is primarily enforcement through the police and housing associations.

'The police have a Cannabis Cultivation Team that we set up. It was my boss who recommended that we do that on a force level. So Merseyside police have got a unique Cannabis Dismantling Team who've specialised. And you can call them up day or evening and they will come. Once the police will go in, detect the cannabis cultivation, arrest the suspects, contain the scene and they will come and professionally dismantle it, secure the evidence...It's more so about professional evidence gathering' (World Café 4,1).

'You've got the housing providers...When the police advise them that there's been a cannabis cultivation found in the property, they get the tenants in and the tenants are warned they follow the court trail so action can be taken against them.' (World Café 4,1).

'It depends who it is. We refer on to Stronger Families and again Social Care if there's young children, which the police could do or we could do. So there are services there but not specifically...it's really more at the sharp end rather than the support side' (World Café 4, 3).

'Cultivation tends to be dealt with on an enforcement basis...So typically once a cannabis cultivation has been discovered, usually by Merseyside police, there's then opportunities for the [registered social] landlord to get involved as we explained before about the tenancy enforcement, but we're also exploring ways to tackle private landlords who are allowing premises to be used either wittingly or unwittingly. But we also involve the utility companies, the fire service as well because of the unlawful use of electricity usually and the dangers that are inherent in some of the construction methods that are taking place...So it does largely tend to be around the enforcement angle' (World Café 4,2).

'We have an awareness of cannabis cultivation but because it's usually older males, that's dealt with by probation and the police' (World Café 4, 3).

'[When it comes to services for cultivation] I'm it, in tenancy enforcement' (World Café 4, 3).

There is a clear dilemma for professionals about the best approach to take in response to cultivation and these tensions between enforcement and support are evident in the difficulties of partnership working, as these quotes and exchanges demonstrate.

'Is the best thing to bring the police in or is it to help them?' (World Café 3, 4).

'Er, my job is to keep them in their tenancies.'

'My job is to kick them out' (World Café 5, 5).

Many note that enforcement responses have limited effectiveness because deterrence alone simply does not work:

'We're taking action but I don't know if we're taking effective action cos people are still doing it!' (World Café 4, 5).

'We took enforcement action against anybody that used in Stockbridge and in all honesty we nearly had no tenants left' (World Café 3, 3).

'If somebody comes in as a user they do get a drug...well can go on a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement but if they are a cultivator, obviously a lot of them go down depending on the amount that they are cultivating, but they get less of a service interestingly' (World Café 3, 3).

'You get someone up in court for cultivation and the sentence does not fit the crime. It's not a deterrent.'

'I think there's quite heavy sentences going out.'

'But they could be heavier. It needs to be a deterrent' (World Café 4, 4).

'You get a lot of people who are coming in on orders and they're just ticking a box. There's no change, there's no addressing the problem and to be honest if that's all they are getting for being in for cultivation or using they're laughing aren't they' (World Café 3, 1).

'There's cultivations going on in our properties that are causing damage to the property and we'd rather the courts dealt with it more severely to be honest so there's some deterrent. Cos currently there's not really. People are getting away with having a whole factory in their house. Nothing happens to them really at the court and we are led by the court so if they don't take any action we don't. So for other members of the community it looks like we don't take any action.' (World Café 4, 1).

A number of professionals also say that enforcement and deterrence actually make the problem worse as they fail to tackle the underlying issues i.e. that cultivation and use are symptoms more than causes of social problems.

'People go in [to prison for cultivation] for twelve months and come out with more issues, to have to make ends meet, no housing. So the cultivation and enforcement of it has even more issues' (World Café 4, 5).

'We can't give everyone £25000 and say there you go, debt solved. So how can we be effective against it [cultivation]?' (World Café 4, 5).

'I'd hate to see a young person of nineteen in first tenancy growing cannabis ending up getting five years. You know, with the harsh sentencing comes really serious consequences.'

'Yeah and it's making people homeless and I don't prescribe to that' (World Café 5, 5).

'You can remove the problem, without addressing the issues' (World Café 3, 4).

Support

It is clear from the discussions in the professional focus groups that a large proportion of cultivators do indeed need support due to their vulnerability:

'I've got a mum on my caseload who's just been charged for cannabis cultivation and that was about debt, paying her debt. It was a quick and easy way, she thought, of getting money...'

'Yes there's a lot of victims here around poverty, debt, vulnerability...exploitation' (World Café 4, 3).

'That's fine educating people but you've also got the people who are growing to pay off a debt. That's the economics of the situation'

'It's times of austerity. People are going to be driven to do what they would not do normally' (World Café 4, 4).

'There's the ASBO unit, the police, there's referrals to the services for young people, like, your Social Care for any real vulnerable people' (World Café 4, 3).

'We also get people who have had their properties overtook and won't go to court to say "it wasn't me, it was someone I owe money to" or "someone who's been threatening me" cos they are a vulnerable person and these have then used the property to cultivate. And that can then trigger a number of other events in terms of homelessness...Decent landlords won't take somebody who's been cultivating so then they've only got a landlord...who just wants the money. And they can also then be ostracised from family. It sends them into a spiral of decline' (World Café 5, 1).

Legalisation

Many feel that the most appropriate response to use and cultivation is legalisation, at least of possession and small scale cultivation. It is felt that this pragmatic approach would remove the issues of criminalisation, vulnerability, victimisation and exploitation and reduce the proceeds for larger scale offenders.

'I think what we're missing is the fact that people want to smoke cannabis. Cannabis is there. It's been suggested that why not just legalise cannabis and then you wouldn't get all this illegal activity going on. You'd get more control over it. And the quality and quantity. More tax...It's about accepting it, because you're not going to get rid of it. You're not going to change it. It's like saying let's get rid of cigarettes.'

'Yeah, or alcohol. How could you do that in this day and age now?' (World Café 4, 4).

'It [cannabis] is not an issue except for the consequences of it. You can get a can of four or you can get a smoke. Is it different? It's just targeted as wrong.'

'I agree. There's a lot of people, innocent people, or young people making mistakes who are going down that criminal path. Had they not got into cannabis they wouldn't necessarily be criminals.'

'If you legalise it it would stop people being criminalised for a start' (World Café 4, 4).

'The previous government semi-relaxed the legislation on cannabis and then had a u-turn. I'm shocked that they haven't actually legalised it. Cos it's out of control. It's more people use, certainly locally, using cannabis now more than straight tobacco. And I can't understand why the government haven't legalised it. Cos that would at least control it to some extent' (World Café 5, 3).

A tailored approach

A case by case assessment and approach is required to identify the enforcement and support needs balance for each cultivator.

'To get them to stop doing it we get them to sign an agreement, a promise to the landlord, promising they won't do it, we make them aware that they are responsible also, cause a lot of people, especially the parents if the parents are using it and it's the kids and then they'll say "it's not me that's doing it, it's our Joe that's doing it in his bedroom". We remind them that they're responsible for the behaviour of anyone living there. Then we try to signpost them to people to try and get them help' (World Café 3, 3).

'[The housing trust] current response is that it's a serious breach of tenancy to have illegal substances in the houses, to operate a business as well. And also the nuisance, the antisocial behaviour it causes, people coming in and out of the properties. We'll get a call from the police saying you need to come down and have a look at the property. We'll go and take our own photographs. And if it's quite clear that it's cannabis cultivating...we will call the tenants in. If the tenants are there...we'll inform them that a Notice Seeking Possession will be served...Even if the tenant's not responsible (because we have had cases in the past where the tenants got no control of the tenancy and the son or daughter's taken over, or somebody else from outside), they're still responsible for what goes on in that property. However, if it turns out the tenant's not convicted, it was somebody else, we treat every case individually, but in a lot of cases we will also give them some support and we may not ask for an outright eviction. We might go for a Suspended Possession Order or another legal requirement. We can exclude the person who has been convicted of that offence. We also talk to them and give them that support and explain how serious it is' (World Café 5, 1).

To some extent this quote conflates dealing and cultivation but it demonstrates the importance of balancing enforcement and support because it is vital not to re-victimise those forced into cultivation.

A multi-agency approach with collectively agreed strategy and responsibilities

Notably, the main recommendations from professionals with regard to a way forward, both for cannabis use and cultivation, are multi-agency ones, in which partners have collectively agreed strategies, specific roles which all agencies subscribe to and regular meetings and/or updates to refresh, reinvigorate and maintain up-to-date policy and service provision.

'And the services, we need to outline what's out there...We all need to know each other's powers and responsibilities. Who can do what? And that's a gap for the people sitting round this table now. Who can do what? How can we help each other?' (World Café 5, 2).

'We don't have a specific multi-agency approach. And we don't have a lot of interventions that are directly related to cannabis. We've focused on the other drugs. And we need to bring everybody together and say "right, yes, let's raise awareness, let's get some...specific interventions that actually target what we need to target. Cos we haven't got that at the moment' (World Café 5, 1).

'I think the council should have an annual one [meeting] where each department comes together and discusses...Like "our team have found that there are drug services here and this is what we can offer them this." I think there should be more of that. It's all about communication. I don't know if that's in place anyway but I've never heard of it' (World Café 4, 3).

This is an important suggestion as drug 'knowledge,' the drug scene and drug services clearly change continually meaning that information for professionals needs to be updated on a regular (even if only biannual) basis.

'It needs to happen on a more regular basis. We need that communication on a regular basis'

'We used to have that communication and that transparency'...

'But because of all the changes, the budget cuts, the changes in service, all of those meetings have gone by the by and they definitely need to be up and running again and maybe even more robust than they were before with different agencies included in them' (World Café 5, 2).

'There needs to be better communication between key stakeholders that are involved.'

'You need organisations to come together...As long as you have a full quorum, there's an avenue where each of the, everyone knows about each other's services and there's signposting and then that service can be invoked. And then it's bespoke for everything and no matter what that problem is for that young person' (World Café 5, 2).

'Consistent approach. Cannabis is here. It's in our face so we might as well deal with it consistently. Multi-agency approach in a consistent manner...So we will always give the same message from all of us' (World Café 5, 2).

Summary

Drug policy and services have historically focused on Class A substances, principally due to the ostensibly higher levels of harm and crime. It is clear from the focus groups that there is a perceived increase in cannabis use (or at least more overt use and more dependent patterns of use) and changes to the cannabis market (the use of stronger breeds of cannabis, namely skunk, and the increase in domestic cultivation). These changes suggest a need for services to take stock of the current local cannabis situation and use this alongside national and international research evidence to inform (re)consideration of their policy and provision. The professionals identified that a new strategy for Knowsley would need to include:

Education

This requirement was first and foremost, and covered education for a range of groups and purposes. Information is needed both by professionals and the public (in particular young people and parents) in order for each to consider their own respective responses to cannabis use and cultivation. To achieve this, an information gathering exercise is required to identify accurate data and research on: The nature of cannabis and particularly stronger breeds; the true scale of cannabis use and cultivation; how to identify (problematic) use; how to detect cultivation; the nature of the causes and effects of use and cultivation; and appropriate responses to use and cultivation.

Once compiled, the information needs to be shared. The format of this education needs to be of an appropriate nature for the target groups. For professionals, education must be timely, accessible and up to date and the information needs to be updated regularly in order for them to maintain credibility with service users. For the public, information sharing should be voluntary with easily available access (the Police 'Cannabis Shop Front' was felt to be good practice). For children, early education is needed to prevent harm through absent or misconceived knowledge. And for young people, there is a need for realistic, informed and non-didactic education sessions delivered by credible educators (informed peers were suggested) on a regular basis and which aim to reduce harm and take account of their lived experiences.

Service provision

A number of service provision needs were identified. Firstly, the provision of specialist cannabis services which acknowledge the specific nature of the drug and its users. This means recognising the different social perceptions of cannabis as more acceptable and less 'dirty' than other illicit drugs and as potentially less criminogenic (or at least with different relationships to, and links to, different types of crime). Such services would also need to acknowledge the lack of current medical interventions available and instead focus on relaxation and social structural interventions

in order to help users to secure an alternative identity and use of time such as leisure, education and employment services.

The importance of balancing the respective ethos' of enforcement and support was also identified. Cultivation raises a demand for services, which may include enforcement/policing but which also demand support, particularly in view of the vulnerable nature of many of the cultivators. It is no coincidence that domestic cultivation has increased in times of socio-economic hardship and policy cannot punish its way out of the related issues. There are equally considerations of community and people's right to live away from drug use and production, as well as genuine risks to cultivators and in particular to parents and young people. A strategy which can be tailored in terms of enforcement and support provision on a case by case basis is therefore crucial here. Relatedly, appropriate screening tools are import to identify what is and is not problematic use and what is (or should be) the tolerance levels for the policing of cultivation. This would limit avoidable criminalisation and excessive or unwarranted service intervention, both of which are issues of human rights as well as financially important in terms of targeting interventions to people/areas of most need.

It was seen as crucial that a common strategy and multiagency communication for both cannabis use and cultivation is implemented. This need was identified in almost all focus groups, in order that all services are aware of each other's responsibilities, capacity, criteria and referral routes. Both professionals and the public would then know who to turn to for help and what the best responses are, for cannabis use and cultivation respectively. Such a strategy would also limit the extremes of service gaps and service duplication. To achieve this, a scoping exercise is needed to find out what services are available in Knowsley, in particular: What is currently available and referral criteria and routes; current duplication in services or gaps (the latter seems more likely since currently staff data suggests they are not clear whether services simply do not exist or they are just unaware of them); and what (prospective) service users feel would make services both useful and attractive so that providers can respond accordingly.

Services need to be publicised. In view of this, a need for an advertising and marketing campaign was identified. Respondents felt that this should be in accessible places (such as the council website, local papers and shopping centres), so that professionals know who to refer to, the public know where to go for help with regard to use and cultivation and so that the public know the impacts of their reporting i.e. the outcome of service interventions (e.g. arrest rates, numbers of people accessing services).

Community Perceptions and Attitudes to Cannabis Use and Cannabis Cultivation

A total of four community focus groups were facilitated by the research team with sixteen participants overall. These groups included residents from different communities within the Knowsley area. In addition four interviews were undertaken with mothers (one of whom was accompanied by her own mother) with sons who had previously or currently used cannabis on a daily basis.

This section of the report summarises the themes and patterns that emerged from these groups and interviews, with the aim of building a coherent picture of contemporary use and cultivation of cannabis within these communities. The chapter follows the themes of the six main data collection areas agreed prior to the commencement of the fieldwork: the scale of the problem locally; knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis use and cultivation; awareness of wider issues linked to cannabis e.g. local crime, health, social, community; awareness of use and cultivation impacts/risks; comparative knowledge of other drugs; and tolerance and reporting.

Cannabis use: The scale of use locally

The focus groups identify the predominant users of cannabis as young males (teenagers and those in their twenties). It is thought that this group use most regularly as people begin to use cannabis during their transition to and early years of senior school. The framing of young men as the main users appears to be based on their use being both visible and obvious. Importantly however, respondents were keen to emphasise that cannabis is / can be used by both genders, all age groups and amongst those who work as well as those who are unemployed.

‘My brother lives in a block of flats.... and everyone other than him are all users in the block...the youngest is say 26 or 28 and the eldest in probably getting on for his mid-fifties’ (FG3).

‘Adults, kids, even older people are smoking it now’ (FG4).

‘You presume that it’s all people who aren’t working and they’ve got nothing else to do....but I know loads of people who smoke it and work’ (FG1).

‘I’d say they’re using from school age and up. They are dead open about it’ (Mum 1).

‘Everyone all ages and they are getting younger 10 and 11 year olds’ (Mum 2).

‘In ‘X’ there are big issues. A lot of drug taking and I would say a lot of cannabis use and I wouldn’t say just with young people I would say with everybody’ (Mum 4).

The identification of who uses cannabis is undoubtedly linked to the reasons why someone chooses to use the drug and participants were keen to express that there are a diversity of motivating factors. For young people, cannabis use is explained by it seemingly being ingrained into local normative culture, to the point that residents are desensitised to its use. Young people’s use is also linked to them having spare time on their hands due to a lack of employment and entertainment options as well as being an act of teenage rebellion.

‘You’ve got second and third generations of smokers and users, mums and dads, so it’s been fine for the mum and dad and in some cases even the granddad to do it, so there’s no morality around it’ (FG3).

‘It’s not seen as something wrong in any way; it’s just socially acceptable...’ (FG3).

‘Cos all his mates do, it is just the expected thing’ (Mum 3).

‘At first it was because if one smoked they all did and they were older than him and then it got to the point where I’d say I’d lost him’ (Mum 1).

‘His answer to everything is that there is nothing to do, ‘I am bored off my head’’ (Mum 2).

‘Deep down I think X is a very insecure person and it was something he had to prove. Asserting himself, cos I think that is his makeup’ (Mum 4).

Other cannabis users are said to be motivated by a broad range of factors including its ability to relax the user after a day at work or for medicinal reasons.

A further theme that emerged is that young people tend to use on a regular (daily) basis but that they eventually ‘age out’ of this routine once they develop responsibilities, such as gaining meaningful relationships and employment, although current economic conditions mean this is delayed for some. Whilst many people continue to smoke cannabis even when they have these responsibilities, their pattern is said to change from regular / problematic use to occasional use.

Many of the sons of the mothers interviewed had not reached the ‘aging out’ phase. Their mothers described their use of cannabis (‘green’) as daily and for some escalating.

‘He is smoking a lot of it to tell you the truth. It’s getting harder. I give him money cos I don’t want him going down the road where he has to start selling it. But I think he is smoking more and more of it and I just can’t afford to keep paying it. [...] And he thinks it is normal to be openly smoking it. [...] He smokes every day and I think that is the same as everybody on the estate’ (Mum 1).

‘He is using green every day, it’s been like that a few years’ (Mum 2).

‘I’d say he could easily use up to £100 per day. It could be more, it could be less. I know he gets it at £20 a bag and he gets 2 spiffs out of it. [...] The £20 bag would last him all day at one point but now it barely lasts him an hour’ (Mum 3).

Notably, the mother of a 28 year old stated that for her son, employment alone was not enough to prompt the aging out process.

‘It [cannabis use] was a daily occurrence. He admitted to me at certain stations that he was smoking it first thing in the morning, he was smoking it in work, before he went on the football pitch and even when he was going to bed at night’ (Mum 4)

However, the development of strong relationship ties did eventually bring about the cessation of her son’s cannabis use. His use culminated in an incident involving him causing serious damage to his flat. This negatively impacted on his relationship with his girlfriend, which resulted in him seeking professional help and undertaking a drug treatment programme.

There is a consistent belief across all the focus groups that cannabis use is widespread and is an activity undertaken by a significant proportion of the community.

‘Most of the lads that I went to school with, not so much the girls although they tried it...most of them do, most of the people from my year, all the lads, all do it. There’s only a select few that don’t or haven’t’ (FG1)
‘It’s an everyday thing...people just do it’ (FG1).

As a consequence of the widespread nature of use there has been a possible desensitisation towards cannabis whereby it has become an integral part of everyday life and no longer considered illicit or something which needs to be hidden. Perhaps due to the extensive number of overt ‘on the street’ users, cannabis is said to be encountered on a regular basis by the residents of Knowsley.

‘You can’t walk down the street without smelling it at some stage, somebody in their bedroom or in a doorway...it is part of the culture...for definite’ (FG3).

'You see them standing outside the shops just smoking a spliff....they sit off on the walls smoking it in groups' (FG3).

'I see it every five seconds of the day, twenty four hours a day' (FG4).

This familiarity with cannabis again emphasises the notion that its use has become a normative feature of these communities.

'It's just as normal to smoke a spliff as it is to smoke a ciggie' (FG3).

'It's as acceptable as sitting there and watching Coronation Street' (FG3).

'It's normal, everyone does it' (FG4).

'It's normal...people walk past mine, they've got a spliff instead of a ciggie' (FG4).

The overt use of cannabis, particularly by young men requires further analysis. On the one hand it can be explained by cannabis use being seen as the norm and therefore people smoking it openly as they do not perceive it as being illicit. On the other hand however it could be that people are using cannabis openly as it is still regarded as illicit and blatant use adds to their (rebellious) status. This latter explanation is undoubtedly linked to issues of status frustration which in itself is interwoven with issues of masculinity and the difficulty of achieving status via more traditional channels such as through the labour market or the family.

Another key reason as to why the samples are so aware of cannabis use is that they believe its use has changed considerably over the past decade or two. Residents believe that there has been a movement away from the old resin based (imported) cannabis to the new breed of ('home grown') skunk strains (FG1, FG2, FG4). Whilst residents know very little about the technicalities of these different drugs, they do believe that the newer strains are more habit forming and addictive.

'In the 80s....it was different...people did it for the high...but it wasn't the addiction that it is now and it wasn't manufactured in the way it is now' (FG3).

The residents also note that they believe cannabis is currently more widely used and available than it has been in the past which has resulted in even more widespread use.

'A lot more people are smoking it now than there was years ago. Adults, kids, even older people are smoking it now...it's getting more and more popular' (FG4).

It is important to recognise here that the replacement of the historically dominant resin by skunk has meant that use has become much more noticeable, especially when used in public, due to the more pungent smells emanating from the new strains. Whilst it is difficult to assert whether cannabis (in whatever form) is now more widely available than in the past, it is certainly possible to say that its use is much more recognisable. Whilst it is also difficult to assert whether it is being used more overtly than in the past, it is again possible to say that public use of the drug is certainly much more noticeable.

Cannabis Use: Knowledge of and attitudes

Knowledge of cannabis use is largely based around each individual's direct experience within their community. This involves personal use of the drug as well as witnessing cannabis use by friends, family members and neighbours but also among people (particularly young males) using it 'on the streets'. There appears to be a firm understanding of how cannabis is used / the role it plays at a local level, yet far less specific knowledge is evident around its effects

and the more technical aspects of the drug. Overall the focus groups communicated a general acceptance of cannabis use, at least in part due to it being such a normative everyday occurrence.

'You won't bat an eyelid. If I walk past [the train station] and see someone with a spliff you don't bat an eye-lid, it's just one of them things...' (FG1).

'People use just to relax after a hard day's work. You know what I mean they just come in and 'I'll have a spliff to chill me out and watch a DVD, I've had a hard day's work' so I can't see no problems with that' (FG4).

'I don't smoke it but it doesn't bother me in any way...it's up to them if they want to smoke it' (FG4).

'I smell people using it; I have no problems with it' (FG4).

There is perhaps however much more to these attitudes of acceptance than initially meets the eye. Residents expressed that there is a level of ambivalence regarding cannabis use, for both utilitarian and self-preservation purposes. For example:

'If you didn't [tolerate use] we'd be seen as the bad ones for not accepting it so either accept it and get on with it or if you don't and you retaliate against it, you're in the minority now not the majority. The majority smoke it or just accept it. The minority that don't....we might disagree with how things happen but if you went out there and started telling people you were dead against it you would not be liked' (FG3).

The idea of ambivalence is an interesting one (see 'Themes and Contrasts' chapter for full analysis). It indicates that on the surface people may think of cannabis as a relatively unproblematic everyday occurrence. Further investigation however reveals deep rooted anxieties and concerns about its use and prevalence. It could be that residents overtly express that they accept cannabis use but that this is partially due to a need for them to accept it in order to fit in to the dominant culture within their community. The focus groups identified a broad range of opinions amongst individuals to the point that their comments were paradoxical. This indicates that the ambivalence phenomenon may well be occurring. This is highlighted by three themes developing from the focus groups.

Firstly, there is clear evidence that whilst people note that they see cannabis use as unproblematic, they also highlight a number of areas of anxiety around its use. People identify a number of problems that can / do arise from using cannabis and specifically acknowledge a variety of reservations and concerns which they have relating to where and by whom it is used (issues which are further explored below).

Secondly, it would appear on the surface that people accept and are ambivalent about cannabis use but this is not necessarily the case. Myriad comments were made stating that cannabis use is both unwelcome and daunting. The quotes below suggest that residents do not accept cannabis use and find its overt use to be a negative feature of their community:

'As much as you're not bothered I wouldn't want my kids to get involved in it' (FG1).

'It's not even hidden as well though that's the scary part, is that it's openly, to smoke a spliff in the street. They're not even scared to smoke a spliff in the streets, that's the scary part' (FG3).

Thirdly, it would appear that cannabis use is tolerated as long as it does not have a direct impact on other people. People do not mind other people using ('it's their choice to do so') but that is not to say that the wider community agree that it is actually acceptable or unproblematic to do so. This appears to be a particularly complex issue. Participants appear to accept use but in reality some do not. Whilst accepting that cannabis is used on the street, they simultaneously state that they do not want to be directly affected by it. This may again be interpreted as a type of ambivalence in the fact that cannabis is used openly and blatantly by *certain* people in the community means residents are coerced into accepting it even though they do not actually want themselves (or their children) to be exposed to it. It is perhaps the use of cannabis by certain people that has led to the whole community having to tolerate it as it appears that everybody else in the community does so.

'There are two or three generation of users that have de-sensitised their own kids to it' (FG3).

'It's the education of the parents. I grew up knowing drugs were wrong because my parents told me that drugs were wrong, it wasn't an option to use, it was the wrong choice in life, when you've got children with parents who use they can't be getting taught that its wrong when mum sits there smoking and dad sits there smoking...those parents aren't saying don't you do this...and generally the kids in our area aren't getting that cos they're seeing their parents and in some cases their grandparents being users of the drug' (FG3).

This notion is further emphasised by the resident's calls for the enhancement of drugs education within their area with a view to minimising harm. Every focus group identified the development of a more progressive and enlightened system of drugs education for young people as the key way forward.

'Can only try and educate the kids' (FG1).

'Educate them and hope that they make an informed choice' (FG1).

'Education needs going into school...the family education isn't there. Education needs going into schools from a younger age. When they're teenagers half of them have seen it for ten years by then. That's life, that's what goes on. Need to educate from a much younger age and people say well how can you teach a five-year old about drugs, well you can' (FG3).

'[drugs] education should come before the first years of senior school [as that is when people start to smoke it] (FG4).

'Like you have sex ed in year six but you don't have drugs education. It's not something that a mum and dad would want their kids to listen to but its life now' (FG4).

'Educated in the side-effects and what it can do to you...and that you can get addicted to it' (FG4).

'It's only in year eight or nine that you do drugs awareness so thirteen or fourteen when they've probably already smoked it anyway. Needs to be year six or seven, before senior school so they are clued up when they go to seniors' (FG4).

There appear to be two underlying rationales as to why drugs education is seen to be so important. Firstly, that young people are growing up with cannabis all around them so they need to be educated about its effects. Secondly, there is a tone that education is the only way to prevent use; that if young people grow up with use being so seemingly widespread and accepted, then they are not being provided with a balanced account of cannabis. There is a need therefore to provide them with this knowledge so that they are able to make a rational and informed choice of whether or not to use (and if they do choose to use, how to do so in the safest manner).

These comments can be seen as both progressive and forward looking but we again have to consider the cultural context in which they arise. The widespread use of cannabis in these areas means that each young person in these communities is going to have to make a decision about whether to use cannabis or not. There is a need for each young person to be 'drug wise' (to coin a phrase used by Parker et al, 1998). Whilst parents can provide some information it is seen as crucial that this is also provided professionally through the education system, especially in light of the apparent acceptance and desensitisation to use evident in these localities.

Further supporting the importance (and current lack) of drugs education, all of the mothers interviewed had made efforts to educate themselves with regard to cannabis use and the services available which might provide both advice and support for themselves and support and treatment for their sons. Two of the mothers commented on the difficulties of accessing this type of information:

'Even like they have leaflets out there about packing in smoking. I even went to the library to try and find something and there was a website on there which had everything for drinking smoking and obesity but nothing for drugs' (Mum 2).

'I'm at an advantage cos I was working in the heart of Huyton until very recently. And I would see issues in my job and I would try to find services for that. But if it wasn't for that I don't think I would know where to go and most people probably don't know where to go. I think it is appalling to be honest with you. Because of the networks I had I was a lucky one. People don't know where to turn to or even if there is any where to turn to. I can remember sitting on the computer cos I'd seen on the telly this Frank and I was desperate and Frank wasn't useful at all, to be frank, Frank was rubbish. [...] People don't know what is available and I was making it my job to find out but even I was not that successful and it's important to remember that when you are in that situation you are at your wits end. So I don't know if it is on council websites or that' (Mum 4).

Importantly, whilst residents do not want their children to use cannabis they accept that they will both encounter and potentially use it due to its prevalence and the cultural role it plays in their community. This is again evidence of the notion of ambivalence. Cannabis is not accepted on an individual level yet the pressures of accepting it on a community level means that parents must face the reality that their children may use the drug in the future.

'I wouldn't want my kids smoking it but if they did I wouldn't disown him or hate him for smoking it, you know what I mean. I'd like be 'why have you gone and done that?' But I wouldn't want him to smoke it but I wouldn't feel any different if he had...' (FG4).

Regardless of whether individuals agree or disagree with cannabis use, they appear to encounter its use on an apparently daily basis. The perception of cannabis use being unproblematic (as noted above) is an interesting viewpoint. It remains unclear however whether this attitude is based on an earnest acceptance of its use or whether the community is putting on a facade due to a process of ambivalent acceptance.

Finally, whilst a number of patterns have been identified in the views of the groups in this section, it should be noted that there are also instances of the sample having contradictory opinions (such as the cost of cannabis being seen as simultaneously cheap / expensive within the same communities). It is also important to say that people's knowledge and attitudes around cannabis use are often blurred by, and interlinked with, concerns they hold around other key socio-political factors such as young people, parenting, aspiration and poverty. Furthermore, their opinions are influenced by their attitudes to other drug use (such as alcohol, cocaine and heroin) and the generic dealing of drugs (i.e. not just the selling of cannabis) within their community.

Cannabis Use: Awareness of use impacts/risks (incorporating awareness of wider issues linked to cannabis e.g. local crime, health, social, community and knowledge of comparative drug use)

As noted above, there is a strong belief amongst community members for the need to develop a comprehensive system of drugs education which provides young people with a pragmatic overview of cannabis. This appears to be a response (in part) to the potential harms that residents associate with cannabis and the negative impact it can have on both individual users and the wider community.

The influx of skunk into Knowsley is seen as problematic as it is perceived as more habit forming and addictive than previous strains of cannabis. It is also noted by residents that this form of cannabis is more expensive and coupled with its addictive qualities can be a costly pastime. A number of those in the focus groups point out that this cost alongside the lack of opportunities to earn money legitimately mean that 'petty crime is involved' (FG1) to fund use.

'If on benefits and smoking weed need to get money from somewhere' (FG1).

'Made them go into crime [petty theft] as they need the money to buy it....and there are few opportunities [in XXXX] to get that money' (FG3).

It should be noted here that the focus group respondents are unable to give any direct examples of such criminal activity being related to cannabis use and base their comments around hypothetical scenarios i.e. 'a break into a shed which *may* have been connected to cannabis users'. The link between drug users committing property offences to fund their drug use however has been a key driver of drugs policy in England over the last three decades. This link is generally based on those individuals who are problematic Class A (heroin, cocaine) users. It is perhaps interesting that this link is now being made by local residents to the use of skunk. One of the mothers also shed some light on this issue.

'Money going missing, [...] selling every bit of furniture in my house [...] He'd sell me if he could, he'd sell anything' (Mum 3).

While two of the mothers interviewed reported that cannabis use had not resulted in their son's involvement in criminality or the criminal justice system, for the other two mothers the link between cannabis use and criminality was more starkly described in terms of possession, theft, dealing, gang membership and incidents related to gun crime:

'Drugs, gangs, guns you name it [...] I was expecting the police to get in touch and say your son has been shot and I psyched myself up for it cos I was expecting it to be honest. [...] For instance last year at the end of October two lads pulled up on scramblers and there was him and his mate. The lad just pointed the gun and 'X' went one way and his mate went the other [...] Apparently it was a case of mistaken identity cos apparently 10 minutes later someone got shot so he was within 10 minutes of being wasted' (Mum 1).

'He was in this car [...] he must have been selling but I didn't know that at the time. Someone had come up to the car and shot him (his companion) in the stomach and my son was with him' (Mum 3).

'He never tells you nothing and then the next thing he was saying I need train fare. I found out later this was cos he was going to sell pot. It must have been pot because he smoked it and he owed the dealer then. It was him and his mates who smoked it but it was him that got the bill' (Mum 3).

The focus group members also made clear links between cannabis use, dealing and cultivation. They believe that they are intrinsically connected, with assumptions that use automatically implies dealing and the involvement of organised criminals and therefore more serious crime.

'The worrying thing for me is not just the use of it but the crime that's linked to it, it's not just the people smoking it but the people selling it and the territories / patches that go with selling. Don't touch my turf otherwise the consequences will be dear to your life. I don't know if it was linked to cannabis but it was definitely linked to drugs recently where shots were fired at a house' (FG3).

As this respondent admits, they cannot state with any certainty whether the example of organised crime / violence that they refer to is linked to the cannabis trade per se. Nonetheless the connection between the use of cannabis and organised / violent crime is made by a number of residents. As 'the most prevalent illegal drug in the community' (FG3) residents believe that cannabis has to be in some way connected with this (an issue which re developed in the 'Cultivation' section of this report).

An interesting issue in relation to cannabis and criminality is that at no point in any of the focus groups did any of the respondents mention people being arrested for possession of cannabis. This is quite surprising given the number of users, the overt use and the concerns over young people smoking it. Again, one of the mothers, however, did have experience of this.

'He left my house about seven, eight o'clock. He comes out of mine and makes his way to the little green by the shops. Anyway he must have seen the police coming so he dropped the pot and the police stopped

him and were asking 'do you have anything on you?' and he was saying 'no' and then they must have said something else to him cos he went 'I just dropped it, there you are' (Mum 3).

A further theme to develop in the focus groups is that cannabis use has the potential to negatively impact on an individual's ability to provide for their family or play an active role in society. This is seen as an important issue as it can have adverse effects on the individual user but also their family.

'Some people [who have children] get their dole and go to the dealer before they go to the Asda to get their weekly shop in so them poor kids...(FG1).

'Families of wasters isn't it. It goes up the family tree' (FG1).

The impact of use is also seen as having a larger detrimental effect on the community as it may lead to loss of ambition due to the notion that 'it suppresses aspiration' (FG3). This is indicative of the wider concerns expressed around the damaging effects that cannabis can have; that if young people grow up using it on a regular basis within communities whereby opportunities for social mobility are already limited then it could lead to a stagnated and excluded generation of young people.

The mothers interviewed strongly emphasise the negative impacts of their son's use of cannabis in relation to mental health and also for some in terms of their criminality, experiences of victimisation, involvement in the criminal justice system and personal debt. Perhaps most striking in these accounts is how damaging it can be for family relationships to live with a son who is using cannabis problematically on a daily basis. Indeed, for some, cannabis use and the negative behaviours associated with its use had led to a marked deterioration in relationships within the home:

'The relationships with the kids are alright he knows how far he can push them. With me it's pretty volatile' (Mum 1).

I've got a daughter who is 21 and they are like chalk and cheese, she is like 21 and at university. She tries to defend me and I don't want her getting involved because I don't want to see her get hurt with him throwing abuse at her. So I tell her to stay out of it and it's like she hates him now. My husband and my lad they clash terrible and I don't want to see them coming to blows' (Mum 2).

'Me and 'X' can't talk anymore we could kill each other. I look at him and I want to kick his head in every time I look at him. I just don't get on with him anymore; I just don't get on with him' (Mum 3).

'Over the spell of a year or 2 our relationship just broke down. We tried to pick things up and he'd be telling me he was sorry for being moody and not answering his phone for days. But it put a massive strain on things and for some of that I'd say we didn't even have a relationship. Because he'd be in bed when I'd come home from work. When I went to bed I'd her him come out and he wouldn't let me see him. When I did he was aggressive, shouting at me and it was really tough. [...] It still has damaged our relationship cos he still is massively affected from taking the cannabis. And it makes me sad it makes me sad all the time and I think that's not my boy' (Mum 4).

For two of the mother's interviewed, family relationships had been further strained by financial difficulties arising from assisting their son's involvement with cannabis. One mother had given her son money to buy cannabis in the hope that this would avoid his involvement in criminality. The other mum found herself in dire financial circumstances and alienated from her extended family as a result of her son's drug debts arising from dealing and in many cases smoking what he was meant to sell.

'You wouldn't believe it if I told you how much money it is. Up to now my count is I am £40,000 in debt and that's been the last 18 months. [...] (Mum breaks down)' (Mum 3).

At a later point in the interview - to which she had been accompanied by her own mother (GM in the following exchange) - she notes:

Mum: 'I don't talk to one of my sisters now cos I owe her money and I can't afford to give it her back and she wants it back.'

GM: 'But no one's got any money that she could borrow to pay it back.'

Mum: 'So I can't borrow it off my Mum to pay her back.'

[...]

Mum: 'On Sunday he came by my house and he knocked on the door and he said "Mum I need £200". I said "I can't help you son." And he said "see if somebody came by now and shot me in the head I wouldn't care." That is how bad he feels. He's not arsed if he lives or dies at 20 years of age.'

GM: 'I was in Wales and I had to come home and give him £200. It's easier to give him the money than to have him put the windows in.'

Mum: 'What would you do borrow it or pay £265 to have your windows put in? But it is every day money, money, money. But it's my son's life it's got to be worth more than £200. I hate him for the way he is carrying on.' (Mum 3).

Perhaps the most concerning issue to arise from interviews with the mothers interviewed is their description of incidents of domestic abuse. Child to parent domestic abuse is described as "a pattern of behaviour that uses verbal, financial, physical or emotional means to practise power and exert control over a parent" (Holt, 2013: 1). The following quotes illustrate the concerns arising from the interviews with mothers on this issue:

'I've had my house smashed. Like I don't go out much so my house is my life ... I have glass doors now and he will slam it and I can see my partner looking and he wants to kill him and I am saying no leave it leave it but he is saying you don't have to be spoken to like that. But I am not having him wrecking it. I had like mirrored frames with pictures of the grand kids and that and he broke them and I was devastated like. It's not the cost or anything cos I got more [...] But there is no emotion there and later on when he has had a bit of time to think he's like 'sorry, sorry', but it is too late then I just don't want to know. It breaks your heart. I know it's my child, don't get me wrong I love the bones of him, but I just want the help for him [...] He thinks his behaviour is normal but it is not normal. He smashes things and he wants to kill and I can see that he wants to punch me' (Mum 1).

'I know he would never ever put his hands on me but he has threatened to do it. He says if I weren't his mum he would put my face in and stuff like that' (Mum 2).

'He held me hostage in our house one day with a hammer for £300, I said 'X' I haven't got it. Anyway he wouldn't let me out he was going (...) I'll just smash your house up and I was saying I don't care, just fucking do it, who cares. Anyway he gets this hammer, he smashed a nest of tables the biggest one of them, it was glass anyway he smashed that. And I don't know what happened he were on like a chair like these but with wheels on, he was sitting on that by the door. He just got up and the hammer was gone. I just thought where was that, where has it gone but he had smashed the table and my mother came in the end, having borrowed £300 from my daughter' (Mum 3).

'I used to feel so scared and so intimidated. X has never raised his hand to me in his life. But there was a situation one night where he'd been out and he sneaked in past me with his hood up and I knew he was getting bad on drugs but he was hiding from me. And I went into his bedroom to speak to him and one word led to another and I feared for myself. I thought he could hit me and I really thought he could. So I ended up moving my bedroom furniture across the door. I was petrified. I never used to sleep at night I used to lie there churning over wanting to go in his room and shake the life out of him and say what are you doing you're ruining my life you're ruining your own, you're ruining it for soo many people. [...] I used to wait until I was really calm and speak to him. I'd say do you realise what you are doing, so you realise the pressure it's putting me under. I feel like I'm going to lose my job ... cos I can't function like this. I was on edge thinking is he going to be aggressive. So yeah I tried to talk to him all the time. Overall I'd say I had a breakdown' (Mum 4).

It was quite surprising that whilst one respondent mentions 'mood swings' (FG4) as a consequence of regularly cannabis use only one other respondent mentions 'health problems' (FG2) as a side effect of use. This is perhaps a little surprising given the public debate around the reclassification of cannabis and the notion that skunk has been linked to the exacerbation of mental health issues within users. However, the association of cannabis use and its negative impacts in respect of mood swings, paranoia and the mental health of users is a key feature of interviews with mothers:

'When he hasn't had cannabis he is like a possessed man, horrible at times. [...] Like my son is a pot head and green is the worst I would argue with anybody on that it makes them go loopy. [...] For someone who takes cannabis, once they have it they are as nice as pie but once they don't have it they can't go for 24 hours without it well you can see all the emotions coming then slamming the doors you are a fat this or that. The abuse is terrible. It is some of the words and he gets to an edge then. If I argue with him it makes it worse but if you don't argue with him when I just blank him he just goes on and on and on' (Mum 1).

'He is really paranoid and I think it is messing with his head. [...] It was like walking on egg shells you're scared to say anything in case he flips and goes on one' (Mum 2).

'I've even said to him 'you've gone off your head on it', cos I do think he has mental health problems and they have gone worse [...] He's Jekyll and Hyde. He is paranoid' (Mum 3).

'Well it wrecked him, it has changed him completely. [...] It was a daily occurrence he'd be swinging from one mood to the next. He'd be shouting and blowing up and if you said that's not right he'd say 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I won't do it again' and then 10 mins later he'd swing back into this nasty mood again. Sometimes I didn't recognise my own son' (Mum 4).

'But I think X is now left with paranoia – it still causes problems. He carried on smoking and he still carried on with other drugs, he told me that. [...] And another thing with X I think as a result of the drugs is that he is like a dog with a bone mum what the matter with you, mum what's the matter with you and it might be that nothing is the matter but by the end of it there is. I do think its cannabis that has made him like that, he can't stop until he gets an answer for something' (Mum 4).

Interlinked with the apparent problems which stem from cannabis use is the local service provision for addressing such issues. Three of the four sons of the mothers interviewed had accessed some type of service related to their use of cannabis. For two of these young men, access to this service was facilitated by their mothers and for one via his involvement with the youth justice team. Each of the mothers concerned noted the importance of their son's preparedness and commitment to accessing drug services/treatment. For two of the young men this was lacking and hence their involvement in these services proved short-lived:

'He has an ASBOs he has been through the youth offending team he's had family first, school inclusion, referral, order, he is in court next month. That will be me paying the fine again (for possession). The way I think the CJS works is. They are not punishing the kids they are punishing the parents. It's not the services it's him I mean as far as I am concerned they have bent over backwards for him. But no matter what you do for him he will throw it back in your face. But he knows that when it is statutory he has to attend whereas if it is voluntary he won't do it. Like the YOT (Youth Offending Team) they tried to get him into drug services and he wouldn't go cos it was voluntary ... he doesn't want to engage with them' (Mum 1).

'No nothing ever. Cos he went to Addaction for the first week. Cos I went to the doctors with him and they sent me over to Addaction and I said do you want me to go with you and I did go over. The first time he went, he gave his name and address and they said come back over, say Tuesday for instance at such and such a time for your first session and he goes back and he comes home to me half an hour or an hour later and he goes I'm not going back there. They sat me with a load of smack heads I'm not going back there. They watched a dvd or whatever and he wouldn't go back and I can't check him [...] You'd have to get him at the right time. Cos he gets on the phone to me and he says Mum I need help, I know I need help, where

can I go to get help. And I say 'I'll sort it. Alright'? But by the time you've sorted it it's too late. It has to be there and then, right then [...] I just don't think anyone know how bad they are. Seriously this is how bad it is and this is something you shouldn't say about your own but I have even said if he were dead, I'd know where he was and I'd know he was safe (breaks down). That's not normal to say about your own, but I know he would be safe. Who thinks like that about their own kid? Not normal but that is the way I feel. But I know he needs help and he knows he needs help but it's just getting it' (Mum 3).

The third young man was motivated to access help and support and in this instance he effectively engaged with and completed a drug treatment programme.

'I have connections with MALS (Mentor, Achieve, Learn, Support) [...] and I mentioned it to 'X' (MALS worker) and she said we have programme on it and before MALS I had encouraged 'X' (son) to take his cousin to a drug counselling place. I think it used to be called the Lighthouse and 'X' (son) was going to that accompanying his younger cousin and I was hoping that X would take some of this in for himself. But it didn't really do anything. But I heard about this place and 'X' (MALS worker) was trying to get the programme for my nephew but I mentioned to 'X' (son) about it and I stood back, for the first time I stood back and X started to make his own decisions. I was tired and worn out with it and I was thinking do it or don't do it I have had enough now. The reason he decided to go was that he had a shock a black out. I had had a family gathering at mine for my Dad's and he had a black out on the way home, he had had an argument with his girlfriend and he had left her in the street and she doesn't really know her way around. Anyway he woke up the next morning with a hole in the wall and the door off and her sitting huddled up in a corner and he couldn't remember anything about it. He was petrified and it was a turning point. He came to me next day and sobbing his heart out and he was soo shocked and he said 'that's it mum'. I think it was the turning point for him. For me I think and I never said this to him at the time he was on really strong painkillers for his back and he had been drinking alcohol but I give thanks for that cos that was the turning point. [...] He'd come home each night and he'd take me through the programme. And he got a lot out of it and he got a lot out of meeting other people on the course as well and they were taking other drugs many for years. And it opened his eyes up – it's been really good for him and he's trying to get into some voluntary work to try and help people' (Mum 4).

Three key issues emerge from the experiences of the mothers. Firstly, it would appear that the mothers have been able to self-diagnose that cannabis has had an impact on their son's mental health. This may well be accurate, yet has to be understood in the current socio-political climate surrounding cannabis and the framing of skunk as a drug which causes / exacerbates mental health problems. Secondly, the problems and behaviours vividly described by the mothers may not necessarily be solely attributable to cannabis use. Clearly cannabis *may* have played a part (or indeed *may* have been an integral reason) in the causation of this behaviour but may not be the *sole* cause, in that the young men described here clearly exhibit and experience a range of social, health and developmental problems ranging from debt to aggressiveness. What can be said is that these issues of mental health, drug use, violent behaviour and domestic abuse all indicate the importance of service provision being available to offer support for families who find themselves in such situations.

All the mothers interviewed have strong views on what type of help, support and services they feel are necessary to address cannabis use. The types of services they recommend include information, prevention, drug education, self-help groups for mothers and specialist and accessible drug treatment services:

'There needs to be information out there right in your face because this is a major major issue and if I hadn't worked in that job and had my family connections I wouldn't have known where to go. I'd probably have gone to my doctor. It definitely needs to be available though I don't know if the drug user would go but mediation services, cos I did hit rock bottom. But often you can't get in cos there is this criteria and that criteria, you don't quite live in the right post code' (Mum1).

'I think it's the little ones who need something so they won't do it. Getting them involved. [...] I think people need to be aware of the damage it causes for the child and the impact it has on the parent/s and

just to be aware that it causes a rift especially about money and I couldn't understand cos I gave him everything' (Mum 1).

'Services to actually learn me first and then like services for him like to go and seek help for himself. He's like "it is nothing it is nothing." But I know it is having an effect on him its damaging him and I know it could have an effect on any unborn kids he has' (Mum 2).

'I think that (self-help group) would be the best of all cos you could talk to them about what they had gone through. And get any advice from people who had gone through it themselves' (Mum 2).

'He needs to go somewhere. He needs to come off it he has to come off it' (Mum 1).

'I think they should have places he can go, like where alcoholic can go and dry out. Because until he actually comes off it and sees what it is doing to him' (Mum 2).

'I'd like a rehab for pot users cos without a doubt they need it. It would need to be out the way say Lancaster, Blackpool wherever so they can't jump on a bus home, but a live-in one. Without doubt they need it. You can ask any mother and I'm sure they would all say the same. They are off their heads – yeah. They are not normal kids, they're not and anyone who uses it is not normal cos of the amount they use and he does need help' (Mum 3).

People also voice concern that cannabis use can represent just the beginning of an individual's experimentation with drugs. There is clear support in the focus groups for the 'gateway' hypothesis which suggests that cannabis use is the start of a drug using career and not an end in its own right.

'I think weeds the gate. Once you open that gate it's a long, long path. Once you've tried one you're gonna try others' (FG1).

'Lead on to the spiral of using other drugs' (FG2).

'People start with weed, then have a tablet, then take something else, its progressive. I don't think people wake up one morning and take a hard drug' (FG1).

'I'm scared in case it goes on to bigger drugs. When I was growing so many went on to become heroin addicts and I have seen so many my age die with overdoses' (Mum 2).

Whilst this perception of cannabis use is nothing new to any discussion of drug use, what is particularly interesting here is how this fits in with the acceptance / tolerance of cannabis use within these communities. This is another paradoxical stance given that it is largely believed that cannabis leads to 'harder' substance use and again questions the validity of that acceptance. This becomes even more complex when analysing the comments made by respondents from the focus groups around the use of other drugs in the area. It would seem that cannabis use per se is justified / accepted for exactly the reason that it isn't cocaine or heroin even though it is classed by some as the gateway to those drugs.

'It's definitely nowhere near as serious as cocaine' (FG1).

'I wouldn't want my kids smoking it [cannabis].....but I wouldn't feel any different if he had whereas if he came in and said he'd been on smack then it'd be a totally different thing' (FG4).

'Using coke on the street would be disgusting, spliff is normal' (FG4).

Closer consideration of this comparison reveals that it is not just the use of cannabis per se that is regarded as less serious than other drugs but also the wider behaviour which surrounds its use (even though this sits in stark contrast to the mothers observations of their sons' behaviours).

'Pots not as bad as other drugs out there, users don't cause much trouble...compared to say coke users' (FG1).

'It's more acceptable [than other drugs] as there's no sort of related anti-social behaviour' (FG1)

'It's up to them and alcohol does a lot more than what cannabis does. A lot more people do stupid things with alcohol than what pot does for them. Pot keeps them mellow' (FG4)

One of the focus groups was able to comment more specifically around these issues, however, and to highlight how the framing of cannabis as less serious (and consequentially more acceptable) is in itself problematic.

'Got the perception that if it's not heroin, it's not cocaine, it's like having a pint....grown up with that...do you want a lager or do you want a spliff? Now got that softer image where it's just like having a pint' (FG3).

'I don't know anyone directly who uses it but I know that the perception out there is that it's a soft drug, which it's not...If people are shooting up with needles and heroin you've got a problem in the community but they're only having a spliff. I'm not saying that, but I think that's the perception' (FG3).

This is another interesting observation. Many communities witnessed a great deal of hardship interwoven with heroin use during the 1980s onwards. It is possible that in light of this, an acceptance (or tolerance) of cannabis use has developed based on the 'well at least it's not smack' attitude. A sense of relief builds within a community that heroin and cocaine are less prevalent and have instead been replaced by cannabis use. This appears to be a type of comparative tolerance whereby the community base their attitudes on how serious and problematic cannabis use is by comparing it with other drugs rather than as a substance in its own right. Nonetheless this still sits at odds with the comments made around cannabis being a gateway drug (and therefore directly leading to 'harder' drug use) and needs careful consideration.

A final comment here should be made on the fact that whilst focus group respondents demonstrate an awareness of the negative impacts of cannabis within their communities, they also highlight how, on the contrary, cannabis can be used without it having any detrimental impacts on the individual user or wider community.

'I know someone who's 50 and who has always smoked spliffs and have never seen him have mood swings. He doesn't smoke ciggies, he smokes spliffs and I've never seen any difference in him. He still loves it. He works and everything. It hasn't affected him working or anything. He's worked all his life and still works now' (FG4).

'People who have good jobs also smoke it and they have the disposable income to pay for it' (FG1).

'I lived in a block of flats, everybody was very respectable, most worked, couple of people lived on their own, that's where I built my tolerance, some people who actually do it respect others, in that block...there was a gentlemen who went to work all day and came home, that was his kind of recreation, it was his way of saying well done to yourself for having a hard day at work. He went home, shut his door but he always made sure that...there was never a smell. He had respect for others in that block. He would say to me 'can you smell anything?' When he asked me I used to say 'no', that was the only way I knew he did, but he was the nicest gentlemen you'll ever meet' (FG3).

Cannabis use: Tolerance and reporting

This chapter has already discussed how a certain level of acceptance appears to exist around cannabis use and how this manifests into a certain degree of tolerance within Knowsley. Whilst this issue is returned to in the 'Themes and Conflicts' chapter, there is a need to firstly identify the themes that developed around tolerance from the various focus groups.

The strongest theme to emerge was that cannabis use in itself is seen as largely unproblematic as ‘those who smoke it don’t cause trouble’ (FG4) and it is therefore tolerated as long as it does not have an impact upon other people’s lives. This is coupled with a strong sense within the communities questioned that an individual has the right to do what they want in their own home as long as this is not having a detrimental impact on a child or anyone else in the larger community.

‘It’s when it comes out and the consequences of what it leads to in the community is when people start to get angry and frustrated about this and what it’s doing to our estate. If people done it behind their own front door, if they haven’t got kids, it’s a different thing (FG3).

‘Whatever you do in your own home it’s up to you but if you’re doing it on the streets that’s wrong but if you’re doing it on your own doorstep...it’s your business’ (FG4).

‘Don’t get me wrong, it does annoy you sometimes when you see a certain person you know and they’re smoking bags of green by the minute and the kids have got nothing. That winds you up. That rattles you. You think well you can smoke that 24-hours a day but you can’t look after your kids. That’s when you do think no lets knock that on the head cos it’s a problem cos they’re not looking after their kids’ (FG4).

This fits into the wider socio-cultural phenomenon of something only becoming a problem when it has a direct impact on us.

‘I’m not saying the drug is a good or a bad thing cos I don’t know but if they’re gonna do it behind their own closed front door then leave them to do it’ (FG3).

For the focus groups the issues which would erode this degree of tolerance appear to be when use has an impact upon a child or when it is used in the street. Here again however a paradox appears to be evident. People comment that their tolerance waivers when cannabis is used openly yet they simultaneously appear to do nothing about this. None of the focus group participants report having previously contacted the police about cannabis use even though they have all experienced this and some express concerns about it.

‘I’ve never reported it and I’ve seen people stood there smoking it. I’ve never thought to pick up the phone and ring and report it’ (FG3).

[Wouldn’t report it] ‘unless it was directly effecting me’ (FG1).

‘If someone was acting anti-socially it might be an add on, ‘oh by the way they’re always smoking drugs’. As long as they go about their business in a quiet manner ...the community will probably tolerate it’ (FG3).

Tolerance of cannabis use and the reporting of it, however, are perhaps different concepts. Whilst tolerating cannabis use on a local level is one thing, reporting it to the police when this tolerance is tested is quite another. The lack of willingness to report cannabis use, even when it is deemed a concern or to be causing a nuisance has to be understood in the wider cultural context that exists within these communities. Feeling aggrieved at the use of cannabis is one thing, doing something about it either informally or formally is quite another. This is due to four key factors:

Firstly, there is a belief that reporting cannabis use is futile as the police will not respond to it, or that if they do, the consequences will be minimal. Respondents note that there is ‘no point in wasting the police’s time’ (FG3) and that even when people are caught in possession of cannabis the ‘coppers just smack them on the wrist and they just go back, sit on the wall and carry on’ (FG3).

Secondly, there continues to be a traditional belief that ‘you don’t grass’ (FG1, FG4), compounded by a belief that it is your own responsibility to deal with such matters, outside of official frameworks. Where this becomes difficult, however, is where an individual community member feels that they will be ostracised if they speak out and therefore lack a voice. This again returns to the notion of coerced acceptance; a belief that you would be swimming

against the tide if you reported cannabis use as it seen as part and parcel of the culture and that you would be therefore going against the will of the community. If a community believes that the majority accept or use cannabis then the minority are left with two choices; accept it and move on or be vocal about it, confront it and risk being alienated. The fact that members of every focus group say that they accept and tolerate use yet it causes them some annoyance and is linked to wider problems in the community is perhaps indicative of this process. As this continues the coerced acceptance may further develop until the coercive element dissipates, leaving simply acceptance.

Thirdly, and relating to both of the above, people are not willing to report cannabis use (or even dealing) due to a belief that doing so will cause them and their families further problems rather than solutions. The following conversation from one of the groups perhaps encapsulates all of these three points:

‘As much as I turn a blind eye, well not a blind eye but I wouldn’t get involved in the issue of why are you doing that, I certainly don’t want my kids doing it....

I can guarantee that we all know a drug dealer but we don’t care that much cos we’d tell the police where they are, where they live and what they’re doing....

That’s cos I don’t want to get involved....

So people do care, to a certain extent but if you cared that much and were really against it you’d pick up the phone and ring Crimestoppers and say listen, number XX on XXXX Lane is dealing weed....

‘But it’d be pointless doing it cos they wouldn’t do anything about it would they, if you did?’ (FG1).

Fourthly, the focus groups believe that those who are more likely to report cannabis use (older people) are actually ignorant about what is actually going on, and do not realise when it is being smoked as they do not recognise the smell of it (FG1, FG3).

There appears to be a dichotomy of opinion amongst those who attended the focus groups. They accept and tolerate cannabis use to a certain degree but this dissipates if the use impacts upon other people. At the same time, however, people will not seemingly do anything about this. This again provides evidence of coercive and comparative acceptance processes which appear to exist in these communities. When this is coupled with wider socio-cultural values within these areas i.e. not grassing, lack of confidence in the police, fear of being ostracised, it results in people just getting on with their lives, seemingly accepting that use is part and parcel of everyday life.

Cultivation: Knowledge

It should be noted from the outset here that the majority of residents have very little direct knowledge or experience of cannabis cultivation generally or specifically within their communities. If cannabis cultivation is occurring within these communities then the majority of residents are not aware of it. Whilst this section attempts to summarise the themes which developed within the focus groups and interviews, it comes with caveat that people’s comments (by their own admission) are often colloquial and anecdotal and lack either personal experiences or evidence to support / inform their opinions. Whilst a couple of respondents do have some personal knowledge / experience of cultivation (through neighbours, friends and family members), the main source of people’s knowledge is based on reporting in the local media of recent raids by police.

[Are you aware of cultivation?] ‘Yeah, from hearing about it in the local press and from the police saying that they’ve raided so many houses at the residents meetings’ (FG2).

The scale of cultivation locally

It is difficult to assert with any certainty what residents believe the scale of cannabis cultivation to be within their communities. Some individuals are aware of people growing cannabis for their own personal use whilst others have no knowledge or experience of cultivation whatsoever. Only one of the sample report direct experience of cultivation upwards of a couple of plants existing in their localities, yet they know that such things exist in

Merseyside generally because of media reports and recent police activity. In light of this it is particularly difficult to identify many coherent themes that emerge from either the focus groups or interviews.

A number of residents believe that cultivation on a small scale is now evident within their communities with respondents noting that 'loads of people are growing' (FG4) and that it is a 'lot more prevalent now' (FG1) with people 'more likely to grow their own for their own use (rather than on a large scale) as 'its like the new fashion, everybody's doing it – who's plants better than who's, who's weeds better than who's (FG4). Other residents, however, are completely oblivious to cultivation noting that 'I don't see anyone growing it in my street' (FG1).

A key message to come from the focus groups is that the residents are largely in the dark about who is cultivating or where it is taking place. It is also noted by one respondent that 'wholesale growers will want to keep it quiet so they don't get it stolen. Probably grow it in more isolated locations and not on the estates' (FG3). Others note that cultivation is largely hidden and that people do not actually know where it is going on.

'Not sure who is involved. Hard to know who it is. Could be the person next door to me and I wouldn't know' (FG3).

'I've got experience of living in a block of flats where I never knew the fella facing me was growing it until I had a knock on the door [by the police] to say do you know who lives there...they took down the door, went into his bedroom and he had this little factory going. I would never have thought any different of that lad and I still don't because he was doing it cos he was forced to do it cos he was told that if he didn't he was going to face the consequences. But I'd never have known any different of that flat in what he was doing, cultivating cannabis, cos there was no signs apart from his curtains never being open in his bedroom' (FG3).

As a consequence of this, the demographic profile of cultivators is largely unknown but residents are able to identify three categories of people who may grow cannabis and consequentially shed some light on their motivations for doing so. The first category is people who grow it in their house primarily for their own use. Respondents note that you 'get kids who try to do it themselves' (FG3) and people 'growing both a couple of plants or more to sell... they take their cut which means that they don't have to buy their own' (FG4). The second group is people who are coerced into growing a crop for a dealer. A respondent (FG3) notes that a 'chap by me was threatened [to cultivate] as he had a debt of £90'. The third category is people who voluntarily grow crops for a dealer due to the financial incentives involved and whereby 'dealers pay people to sit on crops. They get their rent paid or money in return. It's these people who are caught and not the dealers' (FG1).

Interestingly, several residents mention that cultivation is associated with foreign (and in particular Chinese) nationals, although they have no personal experience of this.

'There have been a couple of occasions on the estate where houses have been re-possessed, sub-let.....where houses have been rented, allegedly by Chinese individuals....and it was a complete cannabis farm and the electric meter was actually melted into the ground' (FG3).

'XXXX road, there was a Chinese guy with loads of plants, he never stayed in the house but he had taken the house in renting, a friend of mine lived right next to him' (FG4).

'My experience is that it is foreign nationals' (FG3).

None of the mother's interviewed are aware of their sons being in any way involved in cannabis cultivation, however two of them note that their sons are involved in selling cannabis. With regard to cannabis cultivation in their local neighbourhood, two of the mothers are confident that it is being cultivated locally (although they have no specific evidence of this and base their knowledge on apparent smells that they or their friends have encountered) while the other two have no personal experience to draw upon in this respect:

'What they don't think of is that they must be brain dead cos if you walked by the smell, the smell of it. Yeah because it's just the way it is. But it makes other people's life a misery like mine (Mum 1).

'I have friends who live in the high rise flats, they absolutely stink but they can't pinpoint exactly where it is coming from' (Mum 2).

'I don't know but there must be' (Mum 3).

'I read in the Echo that the house on the road behind our x's (Mum 3) got raided. So it must be getting grown cos they found it in the loft' (GM)

'Not that I know of. But I do have little suspicions about here and there but I don't know nothing directly' (Mum 4).

Knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis cultivation (incorporating comparisons to other drugs, awareness of use impacts/risks, and awareness of wider issues linked to cannabis e.g. local crime, health, social, community and knowledge of comparative drug use)

As previously noted, knowledge of cannabis cultivation is limited amongst the majority of the sample. Whilst some individuals have personal knowledge gleaned from people they know in their community / through their employment, most individuals only know about cultivation because of media coverage of recent police raids or hearsay that they have received from others. For example, two of the groups (FG1, FG3) recount stories that they have heard about residences cultivating cannabis being detected by police due to it having snowed and the houses being so hot that the snow has melted off the rooftops.

The respondents often associate cannabis cultivation with the dealing of other illegal substances and the roles played by any such drug dealers in their community. Whilst some respondents note that cultivation is taking place amongst cannabis users solely to satisfy their own intake, others link cultivation to larger criminal enterprises and the wider distribution of drugs and organised crime. Deciphering exactly what people think about cannabis cultivation therefore is a difficult task as it is a phenomenon that is conflated with myriad other issues.

In general, cannabis cultivation per se is not perceived to be overly problematic in the participating communities. Similar to what was noted in the previous section on cannabis use, it appears to be a case of 'out of sight, out of mind.'

'It doesn't bother me one bit...that's sort of shoved away, it's not in your face' (FG4).

'No. It doesn't affect me in any way' (FG4).

'I don't see the harm in it. It's not harming you is it' (FG4).

These types of responses have to be understood in the context that residents do not seem to be aware of cultivation taking place (outside of that being grown for personal use). There are, however, caveats to these attitudes, particularly by those who conflate cultivation with drug dealing, organised crime and wider anti-social behaviour.

'Growing is worse than smoking cos it brings more anti-social behaviour' (FG1).

[Problems with cultivation?] 'Oh god yeah, people coming and going at all hours' (FG2).

'The anti-socialness of people coming and going, puts them [residents] at risk of low lives who may be violent' (FG2).

'Worried about the criminal element attached to it' (FG2).

'If got a big crop will have guns for protection' (FG1).

'Fights between dealers' (FG4).

It is interesting that certain residents associate cultivation with enhanced anti-social behaviour and people traffic to a residence (particularly since none were able to give any examples of this). The connection is in stark contrast to findings from the interviews with convicted cultivators (see 'Users and Cultivators' chapter on this) in which they describe themselves as 'the best possible neighbours' (FG5) due to them not wanting to bring any attention to the house and therefore keeping a very low profile. Perhaps these are associations therefore that the residents make with *drug dealers* rather than *cultivators* (who the cultivators themselves state are certainly not one and the same person, FG5). Residents' conflation of cultivation and dealing appears to be at the heart of the belief that cultivation is intrinsically linked to organised crime and an enhanced likelihood of violent crime.

Interestingly, even though cultivation is clearly a criminal offence, the three different categories of cultivators identified in the previous section are considered with apathy and perhaps even sympathy by the focus group members. This is due to them being seen in the first instance as victims of circumstance, or vulnerable people, rather than someone undertaking an illegal venture.

'I'd rather my son say mum I'm growing a few cannabis trees to stop me from going robbing old people. I'd say, you know what lad, I'll help you' (FG4).

'I know one person who has grown it and....someone's broke into his house twice and robbed it and I know two on me gran's estate that that's happened to' (FG1)

'It starts from like the top, you have like a drug dealer and then he'll have like a good couple of people who have got it in their houses or in their lofts, but you have a drug dealer who will pay them people to well, its called just like 'sitting on it'...and they're paying for a lot of their rent or they're giving them a lot of money so you've got a person who's just got to have this thing going in the loft and this fella's just paying his elec bill and throwing loads of money at him...and if he gets caught, he [the dealer] won't get it will he...the topdog won't get done and then he'll just find some other mug to do it for him... the people who have got it in their houses are little muppets who can't fight for themselves and won't do nothing' (FG1).

'Chap by me was threatened [to cultivate] as he had a debt of £90. He got a suspended prison sentence as he didn't grass....he had no previous for drugs' (FG3).

'Some people are pressured into it....vulnerable people' (FG4).

This set of quotes indicates another type of pragmatic ambiguity, this time in relation to those involved in cultivation. It would seem that the residents understand that these people are not 'Mr Big' (high level dealers) but rather are people who are either funding their own cannabis use and perhaps making a small additional income by growing a couple of plants, or are people who are being taken advantage of by drug dealers due to the financial rewards that they can offer. Whilst this may be perceived as individuals being 'greedy', in an area of social deprivation with limited avenues for employment, the residents appear to understand people making the decision to cultivate.

There is also sympathy towards individuals in this position as people believe that they are being used to protect 'Mr Big'. This is a system that drug dealers have used for many years whereby they have a safehouse in which to store their drugs, which is now extending towards cultivation taking place in such premises. The residents express concerns however that people are being 'set up' by certain dealers who offer financial rewards for people to grow their crop before stealing it from them when it is due to mature. The individual is then in the dealers debt and has to continue to grow with no financial rewards, essentially enlisting them into a type of slavery. These issues therefore may be perceived as negative impacts brought about by cultivation whilst also influencing the attitudes and knowledge that residents have around this.

A further negative impact that is identified is the 'wrecking of houses' (FG1) by those who are cultivating on a large scale, due to the damage caused by installing the 'necessary equipment' (FG2) Private landlords whose properties are being used for cultivation purposes are perceived as being victimised.

'The lady who's house was used on our estate, she's a victim in essence isn't she, the criminal damage to her house' (FG2).

'They are the victims but equally down to them not doing the checks properly. That filters down to stupid estate agencies just wanting the money and getting any Tom, Dick or Harry in' (FG2).

Of note however is that the residents also demonstrate a degree of pragmatic ambiguity towards drug dealers themselves, despite the associations made between dealing and negative impacts on a community.

'The majority of people now are selling it to get above water aren't they. I look at them sort of people and think good on you, you're not going out robbing old people, yous aren't robbing houses. They're growing it and selling it and to me, they're doing no harm (FG4).

'If there's a need there's always going to be someone who provides it isn't there?' (FG1).

'I don't see pot as being anything big or major. They don't make the money off weed that they do off cocaine and smack but weed is getting used a lot more' (FG4).

'Big dealers aren't involved in cannabis, they're into cocaine (FG4).

The beliefs expressed here around cultivation are further examples of the comparative and coerced ambivalence identified in the previous section on cannabis use.

Cultivation: Tolerance and reporting

The level of tolerance and likelihood of reporting cultivation to the relevant authorities again has to be understood in the wider cultural context. A number of residents raise the point that it is not a case of communities being tolerant towards cultivation, but rather that they do not know it is taking place. This seems to be for a variety of reasons including the hidden nature of cultivation and residents being generally not knowing what to look for to identify cultivation.

'It's not about a tolerance to it, you just don't know. It's that secretive. They never want you to know as they know people won't tolerate it' (FG3).

'I think the people who would report it don't know about it' (FG1).

'Smell of a house where it's being cultivated, people just think they're just smoking spliffs so wouldn't say anything' (FG3).

'The bloke that faced me [a cultivator], people, CSOs always told me 'you'll smell it' well I'm telling you for a fact that we never smelt anything. When the police went in they looked at me and my partner as if we were daft and let it go on...I never smelt anything...he said there were 19 odd plants in there' (FG3).

A number of the themes which developed in the previous section on cannabis use also appear in discussions of cultivation. Firstly there is the notion that if you are not being directly impacted upon by cultivation then there is no reason to report it.

'I would report it if it was effecting my kids but in my street I'm not effected at all' (FG1).

'Only if it was a nuisance and people were coming to the house' (FG1).

Secondly, people again state that they do not want to 'grass' on anyone' (FG1) or become involved as this will only lead to further trouble for them (i.e. further evidence of coerced tolerance).

'Not tolerant, know what's going on and talk about it but don't report it due to fear of reprisals' (FG1).

'Easier to avoid it and walk away than take action' (FG3).

'I wouldn't [report it]. If it's not affecting me then I wouldn't. You're only going to get yourself in trouble by grassing someone up' (FG4).

'CSOs found a cannabis farm in the middle of winter when it snowed because this fellas house was the only one without snow on. I heard that members of that community had known for a long time that it was going on, they just never felt comfortable to say anything' (FG3).

Thirdly, there could (although little evidence of this was expressed by the focus groups), be a lack of willingness to report cultivators due to them being perceived (as noted previously) as victims of circumstance. The cultivators are seen as either small-scale (and therefore not overly problematic) or vulnerable people who are being taken advantage of.

People indicate that they are motivated to contact the police however if the cultivation is 'on a big scale' (FG4).

'Problem I have is when they have £1million worth of grass in their room. They don't need to do that. They do it because of greed. Now the boy on the street is just trying to live' (FG4).

In the main however, the willingness to contact the authorities appears to be motivated by the dealing of drugs rather than with cultivation per se.

'If I saw someone selling it to a child then I would stop them. I don't want to see people selling drugs outside of schools' (FG4).

'I'd be less tolerant if someone was living next door to me and they were doing it cos I would not want people coming up and down my road and I would not want my children involved in that even if I didn't have kids I wouldn't want to live next door to a drug dealer' (FG1).

'If someone is blatantly standing on your street and selling to kids, dealing on the streets and they're actually in your face then you've got the right to go to em and say listen, move...but there's nothing like that happening around here' (FG4).

This later quote is particularly interesting. It indicates a willingness to take action in relation to the overt dealing of drugs to young people but simultaneously illustrates an unwillingness to contact the authorities in this situation. The individual would prefer to deal with the situation directly rather than contact the authorities, which potentially links into the earlier points around lack of confidence in the police and the ideology of not being a 'grass'.

Two of the mothers had previously reported cannabis dealing in their area to the authorities (police and social housing provider), but did so with reservations.

'I do [report it] and it wasn't just cannabis, there was other stuff going on, right opposite my parents' house and I thought this isn't good, because there was people coming and going and people who I was wary about being on the street. So I have tended to. [...] And now there is actually a family that has moved in by me, and whereas it used to be the perfect little estate to live in they have moved in and rented a house and I know that something is going on there. And I haven't reported and I hate myself for it cos

there are little kiddies involved there. It's my son who says be careful doing that cos they probably know it's you. So I am little cautious about doing it but I know at the end of the day I will do because I am zero tolerance about it' (Mum 4).

The themes which emerge around tolerance here reinforce those from the previous section on cannabis use. Additionally, however, the idea of vulnerable people being coerced into cultivation and therefore being seen as victims of circumstance seems to blur the lines around who is seen as a victim and who is perceived as an offender. This perception has direct ramifications for the likelihood of people reporting cultivation, particularly given the seeming culture of coercive tolerance.

Summary

A number of coherent themes emerge from the focus groups and interviews yet there are simultaneously some contrasting opinions evident between the two groups. The mothers (who arguably have more direct experience) of cannabis use tend to see this as a more problematic phenomenon, yet whether the focus group members genuinely perceive use as unproblematic has to be considered in the context of the processes of pragmatic, coercive and comparative tolerance.

The mothers painted a bleak picture of their son's behaviour as a direct result of their drug use. Their experiences have important messages for service provision. However, the small number of parent interviews (four) means that the data has to be considered in context, in that the users potentially represent the extreme end of the cannabis use spectrum and may not be representative of all use and users. Similarly, their behaviour may not be solely attributable to cannabis use, given the range of other individual and social issues apparent in each case.

A key theme to emerge from the samples is the need to develop a comprehensive system of drugs education in schools. This is considered as key to the future safeguarding of young people in these communities. The mothers also expressed the importance of people being able to access information and services which can offer support and advice around cannabis use.

It is difficult to assert with any degree of certainty what the community know and feel towards cannabis cultivation due to them having little direct experience and knowledge of it. Perhaps resultantly, their opinions around cultivation conflate with those that they have around drug dealing and their subsequent fears around organised crime. There is a concern that certain people are being taken advantage of by organised criminals and that these individuals are perhaps victims of circumstance.

There appears to be a reluctance to report either cannabis use or cultivation (although some individuals did express that they are willing to contact the authorities) yet this has to again to be understood in relation to the wider cultural context. The community's confidence in and relationship with the police, the disinclination to be 'a grass' and their perception of cultivators as victims all sit alongside the processes of pragmatic, coercive and comparative tolerance, which can potentially influence their likelihood of reporting such activity.

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Users and Cultivators

A total of eight interviews were undertaken with cannabis users and two focus groups were facilitated with four user/cultivators. In total seven of the Users interviewed were male and one female, they ranged in age from 15-28 years. All the user/cultivators were male.

This section of the report identifies the themes and patterns that emerged from these interviews and focus groups. It summarises the views and experiences of the users/cultivators in respect of the main data collection areas agreed prior to the commencement of the fieldwork: the scale of the problem locally; knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis use and cultivation; awareness of wider issues linked to cannabis e.g. local crime, health, social, community; awareness of use and cultivation impacts/risks; comparative knowledge of other drugs; and tolerance and reporting.

Cannabis use: The scale of use locally

Cannabis use is identified as high in Knowsley by the users. In general terms this viewpoint is supported by the focus groups with cultivators.

'Cannabis use is normal' [U1].

'Used a lot in neighbourhood by young people' [U5].

'It's a social drug where I am, the younger generation, the kids are all cannabis users' [FG1].

'Its just normal people who go to work and they have a joint at night instead of a glass of wine and they use it just socially' [FG1].

'A lot more people using now all the scallies...hanging out on the street corner and all the kids you wouldn't expect to be smoking it sitting in their bedrooms. It's very big, it's everyone who's using it now' [FG2].

'Its old age pensioners, its middle aged people, it's everyone' [FG2].

The cannabis users interviewed report various frequencies of use. Four report that they are not currently using, another suggests she uses 'every now and again', while three report frequent/daily use.

'He smokes cannabis 'all day every day'' [U2].

'I don't actually use at the minute now it's been like that for 9 months. But it was every day' [U3].

'I probably took more of it a while ago, but I am still quite bad on it now' [U4].

'I smoke ciggies. Not cannabis. I used to use it. Just had the odd spiff every now and again. But then I started using it everyday and went out robbing for it' [U 5].

'It's just every day, it depends on how much I've got, what money I've got' [U6].

'I don't smoke it bad, I used to when I was a bit younger, but now every now and again' [U8].

All users report having been introduced to cannabis use via their peers with the age at which they start to use ranging from 10-20 years of age. The majority report that they continue to use cannabis in social situations with friends, with a few noting that they also use when alone, for example when they first get up in the morning or last thing at night before going to sleep.

While none of the users interviewed report using legal highs, two users admit to using a range of other substances.

'I've also used cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamine, ketamine. Ketamine was probably the best high I have ever had, but a bit scary as well' [U3].

'Cocaine just when I go to parties that's about it not all the time. It just makes you happier' [U8].

These young people do not suggest that their use of cannabis has served as a 'gateway' to these other substances.

Cannabis Use: Knowledge of and attitudes

Inevitably knowledge of and attitudes towards cannabis use for the users is influenced by their own experiences of cannabis use. Little comment is made in the user interviews with regard to the acceptability or otherwise of cannabis use within Knowsley and this appears largely attributable to the fact that cannabis use is for them a sociable part of everyday life.

'It was just the lads I was hanging around with, they were all smoking it and I tried it and loved it and stuck with it a good few years' [U3].

'I use it with mates, with my buds' [U8].

'Just at home with my girlfriend' [U4].

The majority of users interviewed refer to using 'green', but other terms they use to describe cannabis include 'spliff', 'skunk', 'rocket' and 'weed'. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the relative age of the majority of users interviewed, many of the users interviewed access cannabis via their friends, with a few admitting to buying locally from known contacts. However, the eldest interviewee (28 years) notes that his approach to buying cannabis became more sophisticated as he got older and his tastes developed.

'I had a dealer I'd go far and beyond to get it. I knew who had a good weed on cos you know people, cos when you're smoking it you are associating with people who smoking it and they'd let you know he's got a good one on there so you would go and see him. That's how it would work' [U3].

This view was supported in the second focus group with user/cultivators who confirmed that they are prepared to pay to get the 'best' cannabis available. They also suggested that young people were becoming more educated and discerning in their tastes, which in turn influences the type of cannabis they wish to buy.

'And these kids they know their weed, they go onto the internet and watch YouTube like the cannabis cup in Amsterdam ... whatever is the strongest weed wins. They're educating themselves on it' [FG2].

In terms of cost a number of users report that cannabis costs £20 per bag and the amount that individual users report spending on cannabis ranged from nothing to £40 per day.

'The cost has also risen - a £20 bag used to make 6 spiffs but now only makes 3 meaning you get much less for your money. He accepts this - 'everything's more money now. It's like buses or the shops innit?' He said he can still access cannabis even when he has run out of money as he generally smokes with friends so can get it from them. 'I can still get about ten spiffs a day even on no money as I just sit all day with me mates and smoke theirs' [Interview notes U2].

'In the bad times it was £30, £40 a day, skunk. But I would have several joints every day. Worst case scenario it was one joint, I'd have it there if I got the money' [U3].

'It depends on how much I've got, what money I've got whatever I've got the money for. A lot of lads prefer green but rocket is cheaper and you get more' [U4].

'I got a fiver a day for school so I'd save that I wouldn't eat during the day. I was just thinking about it all the time. So I'd put that in and my mate would put in a fiver and there is a 10 bag there if you know what I mean' [U7].

'When you're younger you're always with your mates and that and you don't have much money so you all throw in. Cos its £20 for a little bag so they get money off their Mum for dinner money and all that and they just throw it in 3 quid, 4 pounds whatever' [FG2].

Enjoyment, relaxation and having 'nothing to do' are among the explanations that users provide for their use of cannabis.

'There's nothing to do really, just chill and smoke weed' [U4].

'It just chills me out a bit, it calms me down and helps me to sleep at night' [U5].

'Cos I was in a care home then and my boyfriend was smoking it every day so I was smoking it. ... Something to do' [U8].

'I thought it was good for me I thought it chilled me out. All the usual bollocks' [U3].

'To chill out' and 'to get rid of the stress'' [U2].

Likewise the benefits associated with cannabis use included enjoyment, relaxation and escapism.

'I always just thought if I had anything on my mind or that, if I smoked I wouldn't think about those things I wasn't bothered about anything. I was high, I was happy. If I had money troubles, I'd buy a bag of weed you know. And I wouldn't think about it I wasn't really bothered about anything' [U3].

'I liked it ... I like the feeling of it. It's like a bevy like when you have a drink and you want more' [U7].

The focus groups with cultivators suggest that there have been some significant changes in the type of cannabis available over time. In particular they emphasise a movement away from the availability of cannabis resin ('rocket') towards 'green' ('skunk') which they describe as a 'purer' and 'stronger' product.

'[In the] 80s, 90s it was all solid and these days you would never see it'

'Hardly ever see solid anymore, it's all green ...'

'The skunk that you're buying is four times as strong so as a ratio that's about right there...but in my opinion it's four times as addictive' [FG1].

'It's much stronger I would say ... it's all skunk now not resin'

'£20 bag of skunk would last you a day whereas a £20 bag of rocket would last you a few days'

'You get more for your money with the rocket' [FG2].

Cannabis Use: Awareness of use impacts/risks

While the users interviewed associate many positives with their use of cannabis, it is also clear that cannabis use has also resulted in a number of negative experiences and impacts.

No doubt reflecting the nature of the sampling strategy utilised for this research (which involved identifying respondents via a range of statutory agencies), seven of the eight users interviewed are currently or have been involved with the criminal justice system. Interestingly only two of the users interviewed directly attribute this criminal justice involvement to cannabis use.

'I started using it every day and went out robbing for it' [U5].

'He was convicted for smoking cannabis in his own home which police raided and found cannabis and him smoking it' [interview notes U2].

Two other users are adamant that cannabis use is not associated with their involvement with the criminal justice system.

'I used to have loads of anger issues, and the littlest thing would make me kick off' [U8].

'He has offended but it is nothing to do with his cannabis use - 'its just me innit'' [interview notes U1].

Indeed it was more common for the Users-Cultivators to associate cannabis use with experiences which suggest it may be undermining their physical and mental health.

'My health is like proper bad. I can't run for about 10 seconds without coughing' [U5].

'I fainted a few times, I was in hospital a few times with it but that was only because I was hot and my blood level was low. I was getting on a bus and a passed out and in a shop I went into a shop and passed out. They took blood tests and they said my blood levels were low or something and they asked me if I had been taking anything and I said no' [U8].

'I was paranoid, I was so angry. ... When I smoke I do get very aggressive on it' [U3].

'You become ratty, mood swings and all that. But if I haven't had a spliff and someone's getting on my case I have been known to lash out ... It's ruined my mental health I've been through some bad patches with it I've been through the initial stages of psychosis on it' [FG2].

'It makes you paranoid and a bit schizophrenic, but I'm not really bothered to be honest with you. Like I can't walk around the streets without looking over my shoulder all the time. It's not just the cannabis though it's like living in XXXX as well' [U4].

However, as the final quotation clearly illustrates the extent to which these difficulties can be directly attributed to cannabis use rather than other factors is unclear and merits further investigation.

Both users and cultivators suggest that cannabis use may also cause difficulties in terms of undermining relationships with relatives, disrupting education, putting them in jeopardy in terms of criminal justice involvement and in accruing debt. While at the extreme end of the experiences shared, the following quotes illustrates the nature and complexity of the negative impacts that cannabis use may contribute to.

'It was pretty bad to be honest. I was paranoid, I was so angry. I started to smash my house up, put holes in walls and stuff like that. I had had a drink but I know what it was. I'd never reacted like that [...] Loads of debt, loads and loads of debt. I would use my credit card to go and get a bag of weed. Cos I was working I would get a credit card with 2 and a half grand credit limit and most of it would go on drugs and I'm still living the consequences of that. I've been in a lot of debt, at its worst probably £20 grand, not all of it on drugs but I'd say drugs has probably contributed to half of that. [...] I never let it properly affect my work but I know it did. I was always aggressive in work, always getting into the managers faces and that. And there would be days when I thought fuck it I'm just going to get stoned and ring in and say I wasn't well and that and just sit in the house and just get high. But I have always held a job. ... It has had an effect on

my relationships as well. It has broke up two relationships, strong relationships with girls and I'm still not gutted about it but when I think what I put those girls through, it's horrible. ... I was just horrible, never physically aggressive, just I'd play mind games and start arguments so that I could go out and have a spliff. I was just a horrible person. It also had an effect on the relationship I had with my mum. I was horrible to me mum cos I was flitting between there and my girlfriends' [U3]

For some young people it was not cannabis use per se that triggered negative impacts but rather not being able to use or access cannabis proved a problematic issue.

'To be honest when I had one I was fine but when I didn't have one and I had no money I'd get a bit depressed with myself and get a bit angry with different people. Like be aggressive I should say' [U7].

'He felt most of his stress came from not having any cannabis, although he could not remember a single period of time when he had not used cannabis or been stoned in the last year or the recent past' [U2].

When asked about the drugs services available in Knowsley for cannabis use, some users appear unaware of the services available to help and support cannabis use, while others note the limitations of national initiatives like FRANK and the medical approaches in addressing cannabis use.

'Not really no. I spoke to a fella ages ago in Addaction but all different drugs and that' [U4].

'Never thought about asking help from any services. Don't know how to go about accessing services' [U5].

'I'll be honest I didn't know nothing at all. ... I was going on the Internet and I rang that FRANK which was pointless. There wasn't much help there and I wanted it there and then. Just desperate not to use again. ... There's nothing there to tell you how to go about it, a lot of the drugs things they were 18 to 24, there isn't much for older people. If you have never been in trouble which I haven't been then you don't get to know about what is available' [U3].

'There's loads of services out there but people who use cannabis won't really seek them. There's no medication, there's nothing you can get, cos if you're on heroin you can get methadone and things like that. But if you went to the doctors and said I'm stressed out cos I'm smoking cannabis he would say stop smoking cannabis and you won't be stressed out' [FG2].

For some users involvement in the criminal justice system meant that by default they are accessing advice and support for their cannabis use via the interventions to which they are subject. Users views on this issue suggest that positive engagement with such services is unlikely to be forthcoming unless they are at a point where they acknowledge and actively want to stop using cannabis.

'I stopped using cos of girlfriend. The YOT (Youth Offending Team) helps a bit like - just coming here and that' [U5].

'She's [YOT worker] tried to get me to stop, telling me the problems that I'm likely to have. But there's not a lot she can say cos I don't wanna stop' [U4].

'I'd rather just be left alone really. I know why they do it I understand it but it's all down to me really' [U8].

'Just cos I come here isn't going to make me stop taking drugs. I just wouldn't take it while I was in the YOT or if I was coming here' [U8].

'They need to leave us alone. It's not a problem. They are probably all going home from work and having a weed so I don't understand why they get onto us' [interview notes, U2].

'He is only in touch with YOS and doesn't feel they or any other services can or should do anything about cannabis use as he doesn't see it as a problem' [interview notes, U1].

One user suggests that youth/criminal justice workers need to have a greater understanding of cannabis use in order to engage more effectively with young people and that interventions should perhaps include the use of ex-users.

'X likes both of his YOT workers and says they are both nice and understand him. He said if there were to be services to help young people who use cannabis then they at least need to understand those they work with. He said they should have a good knowledge of the life of young people and of cannabis and that the best people to teach them were people like him' [Interview notes, U1].

Users who were willing to engage in the services available enthusiastically describe their experience educative and specialist intervention programmes.

'(At school) we had Connexions - they just tried to talk you off it and that. They had a bus with an X-Box on it and that. They had like a bus converted into, it had screens and computers and all that. And they used to tell you about all different drugs what you don't take and all that. They come weekly to help people like me and that. A couple of weeks after that I decided to knock it on the head. Cos they tell you it kills your brain cells and that and I'm already thick, I've got dyslexia and that is just going to make it worse so I thought it is not worth it' [U5].

'So I came here (MALS-Merseyside) and they sent me on a course 'intuitive recoveries' it's called and it was absolutely fantastic it really was. It was a four-day course, four-hours a day. You sat in a class room basically and they took you through why you crave drugs and it makes you understand and realise and you do exercises and that what are the pros what are the cons. ... It opened my eyes to why I wanted the drugs and don't get me wrong I still get the cravings now but nowhere near as bad. And I know once I go back to it, it is the vicious cycle happening again' [U3].

Cannabis use: Tolerance and reporting

The users interviewed unanimously note the disapproval of their families with regard to their use of cannabis. While this disapproval does not appear to impact on their use of cannabis they do appear to make some concessions with regard to where they will use cannabis to allay family concerns.

'His mum who doesn't approve of his use so he uses away from home' [interview notes, U1].

'X's mum does not like him smoking cannabis but does let him do so at home as long as he goes outside' [interview notes, U2].

'My nan is like not too bothered but my granddad doesn't want me smoking at all. So I just don't smoke in the house' [U5].

That said, a minority of young people note that they do smoke in front of their family, and for one young man this had resulted in him having to leave the family home:

'I smoked it in front of me ma and she wasn't happy about it but didn't say anything' [U6].

'I'm not bothered (by mum's disapproval), not bothered about other people's views' [U8].

'That's why I'm living here to be honest I got chucked out. My step dad is a screw so that didn't turn out very well' [U7].

Cannabis cultivation: The scale of cultivation locally

An accurate view of the scale of local cultivation of cannabis is not forthcoming from the interviews with users. Very few of the users comment on cannabis cultivation and the views of the minority who do comment on it are contradictory.

'He doesn't know about cultivation but its common and people do it because they have no money and no other way to earn money' [interview notes, U1].

'X said only a few of the people he knows grow cannabis domestically. Of these few, some grow in their own homes and some pay friends to grow it in theirs. He said most do so as they are sick of the high prices bigger dealers charge, so they grow for their own use 'to avoid big dealers and the hassle that goes with them' but will always sell some as it's a way to make money and 'you can't smoke everything you grow there's too much.' He said most who grow domestically bag it up and sell it themselves though some get their friends to do it and pay them in cannabis' [interview notes, U2].

However the focus groups with cultivators suggest that cannabis cultivation is becoming more common and widespread.

'It used to get imported and things like that but now it's got a lot easier to grow so a lot more people are growing their own and its much stronger I would say' [FG2].

'A lot of people growing it cos of the cuts, just to pay the bills. You can good money from it, it only takes a couple of weeks. You get a lesser jail sentence for it. They're just going to do it cos they need the quick money' [FG2].

Cannabis cultivation: Knowledge of and attitudes

The major issue which the focus groups with cultivators emphasised is the ease with which cannabis can be grown and accessibility of the materials necessary enable anyone to grow their own cannabis for personal or commercial use.

'It's easy, you can go and buy it from the shop, there's one in XXXXX now and you can buy bongs and all that, you can buy the seeds, fertilised seeds that are down as a souvenir thing, they're obviously seeds, you put them four in there, if you put four seeds in and get one female off there you can get 500 cuttings a month off it. It's easy to do. The weed it's called weed because it is a weed, it's part of the nettle family and will grow in a concrete floor if you leave it, it's not hard to grow weed. Our technique is up and down, fast as possible and get the money, that's how I was doing it. You can use the hydroponics but you can put it outside and it will grow' (FG1).

However, while acknowledging the ease with which it can be grown they did note that cultivation involves some skill, hard work and expertise in order to ensure the quality of the cannabis that is cultivated. The following extracts from both focus groups illustrate this view point:

'Not saying I'm a handy gardener but its not hard...'

'Once you've done it a few times...'

'Yeah, as long as you get your nutrients right... that will flower in this country outside. You'll not get the same amount as you will from a bedroom but it will grow outside'

'You get indoor and outdoor plants...'

'The outdoor plants grow tall...'

'They grow 6 foot tall but it does produce the flower which is what you smoke..'

'Go up to Wales and you see plants in the roadside'

'You can't believe how easy it is' [FG1].

'It's easy to grow but getting the quality right is not easy'
'You can even grow it in your back garden, it takes longer like' [FG2].

This expertise and skill was particularly the case when specialist methods such as hydroponics are utilised.

'Hydroponics is too much hard work. Soil growing is easier than hydroponics without a shadow of a doubt...but hydroponics is only washing the roots innit and one blockage and that's your crop gone. There's that much into it cos you need time to wash the roots everyday, two or three-hours with nutrients and its just that much hard work...'

'Once you've set it up it does itself, it self freezes and the plants last...you get so much more out of it with hydroponics than you do in soil' [FG1].

The fact that cannabis cultivation is relatively easy to establish is supported by the fact that cultivators report that they were able to learn the skills necessary for cultivation from friends and acquaintances:

'He showed me how to do it cos it was him who I was doing it for, he didn't make us do it but it was put on a plate and we took it. He showed us how to do it, we got all the stuff and we got paid and obviously he'd make money out of us doing it for him' [FG1].

'It was from being a gardener for me. I was asked if I fancied it and said yeah I'll garden that, first time was a bedroom with 30 plants' [FG1].

'Just one of my mates from a different area he was telling me how easy it was to grow it. He was in prison with me so I met with him when I got out [of prison] and he showed me some of the crops that he had on and that was the start of it. He showed me how to do it. I got in touch with a few of my mates we got the money together to set it up and that was it we started doing it. And everybody I know, not through me or anything, but it's just everywhere now' [FG2].

'They learn off other people, off the internet, mainly though word of mouth as well. All you have to do is ask someone and they will give you a list. Put this in at that time, water them like this and that's it. Keep your eye on them to make sure there are no mites on them' [FG2].

The cultivators are dismissive of suggestions that the growers would be willing to spray their crops with other substances, such as heroin or cocaine.

'You cant really meddle with it off a plant, there's bits that you can do to it but not a lot whereas solid can be meddled with, I mean I've had 9 bars that I've cut in half and there were nuts and bolts in it and all sorts of shit, you can add brick dust to it, anything but off a plant you cant really do that, I mean I have seen lads put icing sugar on it to quite literally just get the weight up but you cant really meddle with it a plant so it's a lot more pure...' [FG1]

'I've heard that, well not with heroin but I've heard that but with the nutrients you're putting in you can put flavours to it so as the plant when you smoke it you're getting like vanilla essence in the nutrient's to make the taste but there's that many now that you can buy quite literally the seeds and you don't have to touch them and there'll come out smelling of strawberries. It smokes and the room fills of strawberries' [FG1].

'I've heard people saying that it's sprayed with crack and heroin but its bullshit. Well I've never heard of it anyway. I've heard of people spraying it with coca cola and that to make it heavier'.

'And that crystal shit, dry sand'

'Oh yeah, spraying it with glass and that'

'Yeah and then you'd get your bag and in the corner would be a load of green sand'

'I've not seen that for years. Cos as soon as you get an ounce of that you won't buy it again'

'There was a bit of drought on when that was about as well'

'Why would you do it? You can make a killing anyway and you wouldn't want to attract the attention of the police'

'Also you wouldn't want to waste your crack and heroin; if you sell them on their own you make more money. Don't get me wrong some do it down in London, I'm not being racist or anything but the Black community some of them are really into their crack and cocaine and so its no biggie for them, But the people around Liverpool they're all family, they're cousins, mates of mates and all that. Also they're not going to give that to their own cos crack and heroin they're frowned upon' [FG2].

While acknowledging that they are likely to make greater profit from dealing heroin and crack cocaine, the cultivators suggested that cannabis cultivation can prove very lucrative.

'I had twelve plants, six of each and that could pull down about ten grand'.

'Well it depends on how much you can get from each plant, cos you can get between two and five ounces off each plant and depending on which type of weed it can go for 250 quid per ounce. It's one of them though cos it depends on the quality of the plant and if they can't grow it properly even then those ounces of weed might only go for a 150 quid probably. ... The haze that's the most money – you can sell that for £280 an ounce'.

'Although you have to wait three months for it, but at the end of three months you get 10 grand for it and the more you do the more you get for it and you could end up with 100 to 150 grand, its nothing cos you haven't been doing it someone else is doing it for you' [FG2].

Cannabis cultivation: Awareness of cultivation impacts/risks

Aside from the smell generated from the drying process, the potential for electrical fires and the dumping of waste products, the experiences of the cultivators who participated in focus groups suggest that cannabis cultivation is unlikely to impact negatively on the communities in which it is grown. Not least because it is in the cultivators interests to keep a very low profile within the community they are growing cannabis:

'It's not bothering the neighbours or anything like that as you've got no-one knocking on your door, you're getting on with the neighbours cos no-one knows that its there and you don't want to bring attention to yourself so you're one of the best neighbours in the street'.

'Well you're not even there, only there once a week, you feed your plants, not there with dogs or kids or anything' [FG1].

'If you've got people coming and going in and out of there its going to bring attention, its gonna bring the police which means you are going to lose about 10 or 20 grand'.

'You don't want no one knowing, cos you don't want to get robbed. You keep it secret so only three or four of yous knows about it' [FG2].

That said, the cultivators do acknowledge that there is likely to be an element of coercion utilised in gaining access to properties in the local area in which to grow cannabis.

'I wouldn't say forced. It's like 'Here you are I'll give a couple of grand if you let us use your bedroom for 12 week''.

'Its usually other drug users who you say that to... someone who is buying off you...'

'They're not forcing them...'

'The Chinese fellas'

'Yeah it is recently'

'I think they get, the foreigners, I think they get put into em...'

'You see these on the telly when the police are going through the door and there's Vietnamese in there, illegal immigrants and that's forced'

'They get peanuts probably' [FG1].

'I'd never grow it in my own house, I'd just have some divvies on the streets, some weed heads people who are bad on the weed and owe money. You just go to them and say 'what's happening, can we throw a crop in yours and that?' And sometimes they do it cos they are scared and sometimes cos they are scared and skint'

'And sometimes just to prove they can do it. They're gullible. Stupid people will grow it in their own house and yeah most of them will be users'[FG2].

While acknowledging that cannabis cultivation is more likely to be for personal use, the cultivators suggest that cannabis cultivation is linked to gangs, violence and organised crime, but there is little by way of concrete evidence in their personal experiences which appears to justify this viewpoint.

'Just grow it for their own personal use, its not all linked to violent crime, there's a lot of people who do it just for their own personal use cos it costs a lot of money. What I'm saying is that the gangs are growing that to fund other things'

'The police are obviously aware of what its funding, other drugs, firearms, stuff like that, there's a lot of money to be made out of it'

'I'm not saying that I've done it for guns but I know that its definitely funding money for other drugs..'

'Yeah more serious crime..'

'Don't know, gangs robbing each other's crops that's about it'

'There's a lot of people who put grows on who are just normal people. It's not all about gangs and that' [FG1].

'If someone is making 10 grand every couple of month, you're gonna watching your back in case someone robs your crop so you're gonna go and buy a gun. And you've got all these kids on the streets smoking weed, if you give them a gun they'll shoot someone for you for an ounce of weed. It's that easy' [FG2].

Cannabis cultivation: Tolerance and reporting

There was little comment within the focus groups with cultivators with regard to tolerance and reporting of cannabis cultivation in general terms. The only extracts from the focus groups which do seem relevant to the issue of tolerance and reporting emphasise the normalcy of cannabis use within Merseyside and note that cultivation is likely to be encouraged by the impacts of austerity measures on family income.

'I think some people see it just like any other drug and look down their noses at it. However, when you get into any of the housing estates in Liverpool they are just not bothered about it. It's normal for them'.

'A lot of people growing it cos of the cuts, just to pay the bills. You can good money from it, it only takes a couple of weeks. You get a lesser jail sentence for it. They're just going to do it cos they need the quick money' [FG2].

Summary

This chapter provides significant insights into the views and experiences of individuals for whom cannabis use and cultivation is a lived reality. In doing so it raises some important considerations and dilemmas which service providers need to acknowledge and respond to if they are to offer an effective range of services to service users who are likely to prove difficult to engage.

With the caveat that the findings are drawn from a relatively small sample of Users and Cultivators who are in turn disproportionately drawn from those with links to statutory youth/criminal justice agencies, number of key messages emerge from this analysis which suggest a one-size-fits all response is unlikely to prove adequate. Many of the Users/Cultivators have experienced a range of difficulties with regard to health, relationship and which they associate with cannabis use. Moreover, it is clear that specialist drugs services can play an important role in helping individuals with their cannabis use; however effective engagement of users within these services is by no means straightforward.

While it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the extent of cannabis cultivation, the striking issue to emerge from the focus groups with cultivators is the relative ease with which individuals can grow cannabis plants, albeit that some skill and expertise may be necessary for commercial growing. The resultant dilemma for service providers is how to develop and implement support and enforcement provision for cultivators especially given the potentially coercive contexts in which growing is undertaken and the wider pressures being exerted on marginalised communities by austerity measures.

Themes and Contrasts: Summary and Conclusions

This chapter triangulates data from professionals, communities, parents, users and cultivators in Knowsley. Its intention is to identify the key themes and patterns which emerged from the World Café, individual interviews and focus groups. The first section outlines the contemporary cannabis terrain in Knowsley with regard to both cannabis use and cultivation, covering the incidence, profiles, motivation and impacts. The second section focuses on service provision, summarising both what is currently available and what is needed in the borough.

Sources of knowledge on use and cultivation

For both the community and professionals there is a firm understanding of how cannabis is used and the role it plays on a local level, yet far less specific knowledge is evident around its (particularly longer term) effects and the more technical aspects of the drug. The cannabis users interviewed were obviously aware of the short term effects of their use but not necessarily aware of longer term impacts. In the community, knowledge of cannabis use is largely based around individuals' direct experience within their locality. This can involve personal use, witnessing cannabis use by friends, family members and neighbours but also among people (particularly young males) using it 'on the streets'. For professionals, knowledge of cannabis use stems almost exclusively from work, albeit some express direct historical knowledge of the cannabis scene and consumption. Findings from the professionals on cannabis use also need to be contextualised as the data is potentially skewed. Participant professionals mainly work in services with those experiencing increased levels of social problems i.e. the same groups who feature in risk groups for problematic drug use (a theme throughout this research and the extant literature), meaning their observations of the incidence and problematic nature of use may be higher in the service user groups they experience, but this can not necessarily be extrapolated to the population of the entire borough. Certainly two of the participating community groups had little direct experience themselves or of their family and friends using cannabis, which suggests sections of the community remain where cannabis use is not commonplace.

Similarly, it should be noted that the majority of participant residents have very little knowledge of cannabis cultivation generally or specifically within their communities. If cannabis cultivation is occurring within these communities then the majority of residents are not aware of it unless it is reported in local media. However, there are a small minority who report direct experience and one participant whose neighbour's cultivation was discovered by the police. Equally, for the majority of professionals, knowledge was not direct but gained through conversation with colleagues, often in other agencies. For both groups, this is evidenced by a number of examples of hypothetical 'knowledge' (repeatedly transmitted stories) around cultivation. For instance, there is a dominant story amongst professionals regarding the destruction of a period property through cultivation, and a number of the community groups referred to an incident in which a loft cultivation was detected by the police through the melting snow on the house roof. The risk of this transmission process, in the context of a lack of informed knowledge on cannabis, leaves both professionals and the community open to contradictory or incorrect information (see Education section for details).

For both the community and professionals, knowledge and attitudes around cannabis use often blurred and interlinked with concerns they held around other key socio-political factors such as young people, parenting, aspiration and poverty. Furthermore, their opinions were influenced by their attitudes to other drug use (such as alcohol, cocaine and heroin) and in many cases people conflated the cultivation of cannabis with the generic dealing of drugs. The latter is an important distinction to make as in most cases dealers and cultivators are separate individuals with different impacts on the community, the latter being less likely to cause neighbourhood problems for fear of detection or theft of crops.

Knowledge of the Incidence, Profiles, Motivation and Impacts of Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Incidence and patterns of use

Professionals and communities say that cannabis use is rife and that there has been an increase in use and availability over the last two decades. These perceptions appear to be linked to the use of stronger forms of cannabis, namely skunk (which appears to have replaced traditional use of lower strength resin). This information on incidence needs closer consideration as it may in fact represent more *noticeable* use due to the increase in public usage and the stronger smell of skunk. This also needs to be contextualised as the data is potentially skewed (as outlined above). Certainly two of the participating community groups had little direct experience of their own, their family, or their friends using cannabis, which suggests sections of the community remain where cannabis use is not commonplace.

Professionals and the public identified changing *patterns* of use to daily as opposed to weekend or evening use. Certainly three of the users identified said that their use was daily. This is perceived as an increase in dependent use or addiction as opposed to recreational use. This daily use may well give the appearance of dependence, but as with the incidence, this must be contextualised in that professionals admittedly most often work with those whose use is daily due to high levels of unemployment and related boredom and other social problems meaning they may have more time available to adopt such use patterns. This is also given credence both by the community who feel such patterns of use are more likely to exist amongst the young, unemployed and those without parental responsibilities, and the young male unemployed users interviewed, most of whom said that cannabis filled their time as they had little else to do.

Whilst it is not possible from this data to establish whether there has been an actual increase in the levels of cannabis use, it is possible to assert that use has become more overt and noticeable. As a consequence of this, there is a belief that cannabis use is a normative feature of the communities in Knowsley, that its use is more problematic on an individual and community level and that this implies a need to expand service provision in this area. This demonstrates the need to consider what is defined as problematic and the proportion of users who could be described in such terms. This is not a straightforward task, but is an important one to consider: To over-identify problematic cannabis use can infringe on human rights and waste valuable resources through undue criminalisation and unnecessary service intervention; to under-identify can leave people without access to the services they need.

Motivations for use

All groups felt there are a diverse range of motivations for cannabis use. Both professionals and community groups agreed that it is at least in part due to the increased acceptability and normalisation in that this has become a normative feature of the communities of Knowsley. Communities in particular felt this was a feature of the lifestyle of those with few alternative demands on their time including the young, the bored and the unemployed, something confirmed in the interviews with users themselves. This is also supported by the idea from communities and mums that desistance from, or reductions in, cannabis use occur through an 'aging out' process and the development of personal responsibilities; a situation which may currently be delayed for many young people by current socio-economic conditions.

Professionals and communities feel that the main motivators for using cannabis are to relax, to socialise and in some cases to self-medicate. Many feel that these factors are status and age graded in that relaxation is more a feature of employed people's use; socialising for young people (again confirmed by the cannabis users interviewed) and self-medication for older people.

Users also cite consumption by their peers as a reason for cannabis use. Unlike historical conceptions of peer transmission, this relates to peer *association* not peer *pressure*. Cannabis use is seen simply as a shared experience amongst friends with associated normative concepts, in particular that its use is unproblematic (for example the idea that it is a natural product as it is grown rather than manufactured). In addition, cannabis use might simply be argued to be an example of what was described by professionals as ‘risk taking’ behaviour, something which in fact forms the basis of the majority of young people’s learning and certainly, as the users confirmed, something that is part of their socialisation in that peers introduce them to the drug. Additionally this may be part of a predictable and historically evident young people’s culture of challenging extant social norms. Interestingly, the ‘normalisation’ of cannabis smoking in some groups does *not* equate to a normalisation of *all* drug use. Peer pressure can actually work in positive ways here in that professionals report that those using anything other than cannabis (i.e. class A drugs) are ousted from their peer networks. This is confirmed by community discussions which suggest that cannabis is tolerated by some but not class A drugs (see discussion of ‘comparative endurance’ in ‘Tolerance and Reporting: Use’ section). Similarly, the cannabis users themselves reported little use of drugs other than cannabis and, notably, no use of legal highs.

Profiles of users

Professionals and the community say initially that there is no common profile for users as ‘everyone is doing it’. Closer questioning reveals that what this means is that all ages, employment types and social groups *can* use but it is more prolific amongst certain demographics.

Both professionals and community groups agreed that whilst cannabis is used by all age groups, the predominant users are young people. Both groups feel that the reasons for this are firstly because they are likely to experiment in the transition to and early years of senior school. Secondly the use of this group is generally more overt and obvious, often on the street.

Similarly, professionals and the community feel that both genders use, albeit again males are said to be the main users, again linked to their more public use. Females are said to be less overt and more likely to use indoors as they are subject to social assumptions about the female role. The mums group told us that a woman was seen as a ‘skank’ if she uses publicly and that mums with their children present would be extremely unlikely to use in public.

Professionals say that those with a range of social problems are the highest users of cannabis; those in emergency accommodation; with a criminal record; in services and those who are unemployed. School attendance proved protective in that local research identified that school children have lower than average reported use (as is the case with national statistics). This serves to support the idea that professionals are more likely to be in contact with individuals who are more likely to smoke daily.

Tolerance and reporting of use

It is generally suggested that there has been an increase in tolerance of cannabis use, albeit potentially age differentiated with young people perhaps more tolerant/less likely to report use than older people. The focus groups identified a range of opinions on tolerance which initially appear both paradoxical and dichotomous in that whilst many feel cannabis use is accepted, they simultaneously highlight a number of areas of anxiety around its use. People appear to accept use but in reality their concerns suggest they do not. Acceptance is also context specific in that people accept that cannabis is used on the street yet at the same time state that they do not want to be directly affected by it. The reasons for tolerance therefore require closer consideration and analysis to unpick the difference between those for whom cannabis use appears genuinely unproblematic and those for whom tolerance masks deep rooted anxieties and concerns about its use and prevalence. Residents and professionals express a range of tolerance typologies with both utilitarian and self-preservation purposes:

'Unproblematic acceptance' meaning that some people do not mind people using ('it's a choice to do so') and think of cannabis as an everyday occurrence which is simply unproblematic.

'Pragmatic ambivalence' in that other residents overtly express that they accept cannabis use provided that it does not have a direct impact on other people (particularly themselves, their own children or indeed any children), principally due to a need for them to accept it in order to fit into the dominant culture within their community. This is demonstrated by the fact that none of the community groups had previously contacted the police about cannabis use even though they had all experienced it and the majority were against it.

'Comparative endurance' links to a positioning of cannabis use against the problematic heroin use from the 1980s onwards and acceptance (or tolerance) of cannabis use based on the 'well at least it's not heroin' attitude. A sense of relief builds within a community that heroin and cocaine are less prevalent and have instead been replaced by cannabis use. There are paradoxes in comparative endurance in that whilst cannabis is said to be tolerable as it is not heroin, the gateway theory beliefs held by many members of the community, and indeed some professionals, suggest cannabis can lead to the use of stronger drugs which taken to its logical conclusion mean it should not be tolerated. (Gateway theory is however, without evidence, see discussion in 'Impacts of use' section).

'Coercive compliance' of cannabis use means residents are coerced into accepting it even though they do not actually want themselves (or their children) to be exposed to it and because they are fearful of the consequences of disagreeing with the perceived majority.

Professional views were consistent with these categories, stating that that some people tolerate as they do not see use as a problem (unproblematic acceptance), some because they simply accept the status quo (pragmatic ambivalence) and others in fear who dare not contradict the majority (coercive tolerance).

Notably both professionals and community groups identified that some people 'tolerate' meaning that they do not report cannabis use. In only one community group was arrest for cannabis use mentioned and in none did anyone identify people actually being convicted for cannabis use alone, a surprising omission in view of the reported levels of public use. The lack of reporting also relates to issues of police-community relations and wider cultural concerns regarding not 'being a grass.'

Notably, the capacity for *intolerance* of cannabis to reduce the amount users consume appears to be minimal. The young people interviewed are clear that their parents are unhappy about their use but say that this is not their primary concern and that it certainly does not impact on their decisions on whether or not to use.

Impacts of use

A number of community members feel that cannabis is linked to petty theft to fund use, although in many cases this was a projection, potentially conflating cannabis with use of other drugs and another example of the application of hypothetical knowledge (i.e. in that these were projections of what was likely rather than based on direct examples) and was often based on inflated assumptions of levels of use and cost (for example the belief that cannabis users commonly smoke £100 worth a day).

Of the mums, two said their sons use had not resulted in links to criminality or the criminal justice system, but two reported criminality in their using sons in terms of possession, theft, dealing, gang membership and incidents related to gun crime.

Community groups feel that there is little connection between serious anti-social behaviour and cannabis use. Whilst people are not necessarily comfortable with large groups of young people smoking cannabis publicly, there is again evidence of 'comparative endurance' in that people feel that this was at least better than the actions of cocaine and alcohol users.

Both professionals and community groups express anxieties due to the fact that both young people (and sometimes parents, either for themselves or on their child's behalf) have little option but to have involvement with dealers in order to access cannabis due to illegal nature of use. The concern is that this leaves both at risk of being able to access a range of other drugs as well as the risks of exploitation and aggression by getting into debt with dealers.

Professionals identified the risk of mental health issues (paranoia anxiety psychosis) through cannabis use, though only a small number, mainly from mental health teams had direct experience of this. There are particular concerns around stronger strains of cannabis and again a need for more information on what impact skunk is likely to have. There is also concern about the use of tobacco alongside cannabis, even in those who do not ordinarily smoke cigarettes.

In the community groups, only one respondent mentioned 'mood swings' as a consequence of regularly cannabis use and one respondent mentioned 'health problems' as a side effect of use. This is perhaps a little surprising given the public debate around the reclassification of cannabis and the notion that skunk has been linked to the exacerbation of mental health issues within users. In contrast, mood swings, paranoia and the mental health of users was a key feature of interviews with mothers who had experienced high levels of paranoia in their using sons. Similarly, the cannabis users interviewed said that they felt aggressive, although this was mainly when they were unable to access the drug as opposed to an immediate effect of it.

A number of professionals, community members and two cultivators refer to the idea of gateway theory (i.e. the idea that cannabis use leads to the use of stronger substances). However, this is an example of hypothetical knowledge as they are unable to provide direct experience or evidence of this and research suggests it is without foundation (see Literature Review Chapter). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the users interviewed do not feel that gateway theory is reflected in their experiences, not least because few use other drugs. Suffice to say that a simple calculation of the large numbers who try cannabis compared to the very small numbers who use class A drugs (as reported in the Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2013) demonstrates that this theory is tenuous. Nevertheless, the concept that having to access cannabis through dealers who may offer access to other drugs, as well as the idea that cannabis use for young people is simply one of a number of 'risk-taking' behaviours, are worthy of further consideration.

Some professionals suggest that cannabis use can result in increased violence and aggression in the home, particularly in terms of young people being aggressive towards parents in their pursuit of money to fund cannabis use. As stated, this aggression was reported by some of the users interviewed. The mums interviewed certainly reported instances of this and a couple referred to situations which had escalated to severe domestic violence. There are suggestions that the increase in personal use and rising costs of cannabis increase the likelihood of young people stealing from their family in the home. These are serious issues which need further investigation to establish whether cannabis causes or compounds extant problems.

The community groups identify social impacts of cannabis use both at the individual and community level. Community groups and mums in particular discussed the potentially negative impacts of use on an individual's ability to provide for their families or play an active role in society. Similarly young people who use say that cannabis causes problems within the family and educational disruption. Professionals focused more on the detrimental impact on the larger community as cannabis use may lead to the removal of ambition due to the notion that it suppresses aspirations. This is indicative of the wider concerns expressed around the damaging effects that cannabis could have, that if young people grow up using it on a regular basis within communities where opportunities for social mobility are already limited, then it could lead to a stagnated and excluded generation of young people. This links to the concerns of professionals (discussed in the 'Motivation' section) that Knowsley as an area perceives, or indeed experiences, a glass ceiling of ambition in that high levels of social problems lead communities to believe that there are no legitimate opportunities for upward social mobility and status. This is an interesting contradiction in that it was suggested in all participant groups that cannabis is also used by the employed and socially mobile. However, this may be explained by the more recreational patterning of use in those with higher external demands on their time.

Incidence/scale of cultivation

Professionals, the community and mums are unsure of the incidence and extent of cultivation, not least because they say it is underreported due to its concealed nature. Most believe that domestic cultivation is increasing but none are able to express the precise extent as, for many, cultivation (of anything more than a couple of plants) is outside their direct experience so they are unable to comment (see Knowledge of Cannabis Use and Cultivation section). Most only know that such things exist in Merseyside because of media reports and recent police activity. Professionals mainly say that cultivation is borough wide but they make clear that this is in 'pockets' i.e. specific estates and roads. Cultivators themselves said that cultivation is quite common due to the ease of access to equipment and readily available information on how to grow (most having learned from someone they knew).

Professionals commonly reported that cultivation is more fragmented in that there are no longer thought to be many large cultivation sites/farms in industrial premises due to a shift in cultivation to domestic premises. This is felt to be in order that dealers reduce the risk of detection either by those wishing to steal their crops or indeed the police and to reduce the risk of punishment should detection occur. Again this is confirmed by cultivators themselves. This domestic cultivation is said to mainly take place in public housing but increasingly in private rentals due to attractive nature of absent landlords and less policed streets.

Profiles of cannabis cultivators

In community groups, the demographical profile of cultivators is largely unknown. Likewise most professionals say there is no identifiable patterning to who cultivates. This is qualified by suggestions from all research groups that cultivation happens in *all* socio-economic groups but that this is *most likely* to be attractive to those struggling to find (well paid) employment and income in the mainstream market, and those with what is perceived as 'less to lose,' for example the unemployed, young males and those without dependents. The cultivators interviewed were all male and ranged in age, some initially worked whilst cultivating, and others did not. Little can be extrapolated from their demographics due to the small number and unrepresentative sampling (i.e. all were convicted cultivators in a male prison).

With regard to ethnicity, the only repeated suggestion regarding demographics in this area was from the community who suggested that larger-scale operations are more likely to be run 'by the Chinese' although again none of the participants were able to offer examples of direct experience in this regard.

Some of the mums who were interviewed reported that a number of landlords are knowing participants in cultivation. In contrast professionals and community members almost invariably identified landlords as unknowing victims whose properties are damaged by cultivators.

Motivation for cannabis cultivation

In the community groups, residents are able to identify three categories of people who may grow cannabis and consequentially shed some light on their motivations for doing so. The first category is people who grow it in their house primarily for their own use. The second group is people who are coerced into growing a crop for a dealer. The third category is people who voluntarily grow crops for a dealer due to the financial incentives.

Similarly professionals and cultivators themselves say finance and structural/economic conditions are the main motivators, with cultivation as an increasing cottage industry in which some improve their lifestyle as it provides a source of employment and income in a stagnant economy. Professionals, also similar to community groups, identify coercion, vulnerability and victimisation and reasons for cultivation. In addition they say that a lack of role models and the 'glass ceiling,' accessibility of equipment, growing capacity and low detection prospects all contribute to motivation to cultivate. Professionals say small numbers do appear to be growing for their own use but that they know of few, presumably as by definition they fail to come to services attention.

Reporting and tolerance of cultivation

Professionals feel it is antisocial behaviour and concerns about potential links to organised crime that produce anxieties in the community, not the cultivation or dealing per se. Community members agree, saying they are concerned at the prospect of large numbers of unknown people entering their neighbourhood seeking out dealers houses or other antisocial issues such as smells or excessive parking in their street (although notably this appears to be conflating dealing and cultivation). Similar to tolerance of cannabis use, cannabis cultivation is viewed by many as not being problematic provided people grow for themselves and do not impact on others.

In many respects, in discussions about reporting and tolerating cultivation, the community focus groups mirror the tolerance typologies outlined with regard to use: 'Unproblematic accepters' feel that cannabis cultivation as a means of income is legitimate. In an area of social deprivation with limited avenues for employment such as Knowsley, the residents appear to understand people making the decision to cultivate. There is also some sympathy towards people in this position due to some people being seen as vulnerable, with dealers exploiting them. Some display 'pragmatic ambivalence' in that they know cultivation happens but are unconcerned so long as it does not affect them or their own or others' children. 'Comparative endurance' is demonstrated by those who feel that heroin and cocaine markets involve people who are more dangerous and making more money, whereas cultivators of cannabis are less 'big league.' And 'coercive compliance' of cannabis cultivation is evident in those who conflate large scale dealers and cannabis cultivators so 'tolerate' or fail to report due to fear of reprisals.

There is however a limit to community tolerance in that members of the public state that they will report cultivation in certain circumstances, for example if someone is being 'greedy' i.e. large-scale production, and in instances where children are neglected or at risk of harm.

Impacts of cultivation

There are clearly incentives to cannabis cultivation, particularly for those who struggle to gain employment or earn high wages in the mainstream economy. The 'cottage industry' philosophy says cultivation has a positive impact in economic terms in that it runs like a business to get people out of debt and can help (particularly young) people with few prospects to make a lot of money so they are financially better off. This is something recognised by both professionals and the community groups (as outlined in the Motivation section).

From a public finance perspective, cultivation is suggested to reduce criminal justice costs as it reduces levels of acquisitive crime due to a reduced need for other sources of income and a reduced level of arrests due to the compliance of cannabis users (see 'Links to and upscaling of criminality and criminalisation' section). One professional participant even suggested that this may be an unofficial reason for *not* targeting the issue

Professionals described a significant increase in people entering the criminal justice system through the policing of use and cultivation, particularly people they identified as outside the usual service user profile. This is said to be particularly the case as socio-economic conditions deteriorate, again suggesting that cultivation is an effect more than a cause of social problems. This is particularly a concern due to the vulnerability and exploitation of many of those who cultivate.

Professionals identify the need for clear and consistent messages to be communicated around the legal responses to cultivation. In particular it is felt that there are inconsistencies in police responses. For instance forces appear to respond differently depending on the area, based on different calculations of the value of the plants. This was confirmed by two cultivators from different areas who respectively said that plant values are over and under estimated by the police.

Professionals commonly associate cultivation with the theft of electricity and the upscaling of criminality (for instance cultivators paying off debts to dealers by carrying out more serious offences such as storing firearms). Little mention is made of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) by professionals apart from those representing the police and housing agencies, but most feel there are individual dealers controlling patches of cultivators and that this has the

potential to cause turf issues, again something confirmed by cultivators. It is difficult to ascertain what community groups know about the links between cultivation and crime in terms of anti-social behaviour as they generally conflate cultivation with dealing, expressing concerns about the increased footfall of strangers (as discussed in the Reporting and Tolerance of Cultivation section).

Professionals say cultivators make good neighbours as they do not want to draw attention to their activities, either from the police or other cultivators or dealers. This is confirmed by the cultivators themselves who say they make considerable efforts to keep a low profile and community data in that only one member of the public had direct experience of cultivation and he said that there was no way anyone would know. This confirms the misguided concerns of some members of the public with regard to the links between anti-social behaviour and cultivation.

Professionals are also concerned that cultivators themselves are at risk of losing tenancies, losing electricity meters which are expensive to have reinstalled (raising the risk of debt) and the difficulties of being rehoused following a cultivation conviction or housing enforcement action.

A number of professionals raise concerns about the impact of cultivation on the children of cultivators, in terms of risks relating to cannabis in the property (from the plants and from electrical hazards) as well as in terms of neglect (either of care responsibilities or the provision of basic needs). Equally there are concerns for the parents themselves, particularly lone parents, who become involved through debt but end up with much greater problems in terms of safety, child protection and criminal justice.

Relatedly, perhaps the greatest concerns of professionals are around the vulnerability of those who become involved in cultivating for other people, and whose problems spiral as a result. There are particular anxieties that young people, or indeed their parents and families may become involved in cultivation because they have been manipulated/forced/exploited and that this can worsen extant social problems such as debt. Spiralling social problems are also identified at the community level in that professionals feel that the linking of cannabis cultivation within a specific area can have negative implications for its reputation and that this is particularly the case in Knowsley.

Professionals are able to identify both positive and negative health impacts of cannabis cultivation. On one level some feel that cultivation produces some tangible benefits (such as skunk being less likely to be adulterated than other strands of cannabis), a view supported by the cultivators themselves (see Education for Professionals section). On another level however, there are anxieties relating to skunk and its higher THCs which professionals feel make for a more addictive product which is more likely to enhance any existing mental health problems amongst users. It is difficult to say whether such increases are a reality, and if they are, whether they relate to the higher levels of THC or the increase in daily/constant rather than occasional/recreational use reported. A number of professionals feel that skunk has a potentially more damaging effect on undeveloped minds of young people, and mental health issues are certainly referred to by some of the cannabis users interviewed, meaning it is something which perhaps warrants further investigation.

Current and Future Responses to Cannabis Use and Cultivation in Knowsley

Like all drug issues, cannabis consumption and cultivation are complex matters, with multiple causes, people profiles, patterns, motivations, incidence, responses and impacts. This range of factors was mirrored by the skill set of the professionals present at the World Café, each of whom had knowledge specific to their role: Some working with older people; some with younger; some with users; some with cultivators; some from a health perspective; some criminal justice. As a result, collectively they were able to provide insights into a broad range of areas of service provision and policy. As individuals however, many understandably struggled with the 'crystal ball gazing' session where they were asked to outline their dream responses to cannabis use and cultivation (i.e. planning future policy and services). The range of issues, people and factors involved made this a very difficult task. Many staff felt that alone they simply could not envisage a complete vision of the future for cannabis services. However, triangulating their views and arranging them into strategy areas does achieve the task of identifying a way forward.

Service availability and provision: Use

There is some disagreement about the availability of cannabis services in Knowsley. Some say there are services available, whilst others say there are no cannabis use services, not least because sections of both professionals and the community do not see cannabis use as an issue, due to assumptions that cannabis remains the same as it has been historically (a mild drug used recreationally).

At the heart of this apparent inconsistency about service availability are two issues. Firstly the availability of information about extant services (discussed in the 'Advertising of Services: Use' section) and secondly the fact that whilst there are services available, many are generic, either providing services for a range of social problems (e.g. Stronger Families, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and housing providers) or a range of types of drug use. Professionals support this view, saying that there is a lack of cannabis *specific* provision as this is eclipsed by a funding focus on class A drug users and services which meet their needs. This is something they feel now needs addressing as the demand for cannabis specific services is now increasing.

In terms of the form such services should take, professionals and mums of users say that cannabis users of all ages, whilst they may be experiencing problems, will perhaps not attend a generic drug service as the problems associated with other drugs were not seen as applicable to them and the stereotypes of other types of drug use make shared services unattractive. The suggestion here is that separate cannabis-only services should be considered. Similarly relating to stigma, services need to be sensitive to the fact that some people may wish to attend anonymously or at least discreetly, in particular parents of cannabis users, mums who use and young people.

Relatedly, cannabis service provision by generic agencies is seen as problematic in that professionals and mums of users state that they are unsure of whose remits include cannabis users specifically, and some feel that there are services available for cannabis users but that very specific referral criteria in different agencies is a barrier to gaining access. Again this is about information flow between services, but also relates to provision for all types of people and all age groups in that services in school were identified but adult services were rarely mentioned, housing associations were mentioned but not services for owner occupiers. Perhaps due to the lack of information about services for cannabis use, some professionals feel that what is being done is simply not enough, particularly due to the perceived rise in cannabis acceptability and use.

It is strongly felt that, particularly in young people's services, a proactive preventative approach is required to access young people early and to make clear straight away that cannabis use can carry risks. In a number of professional groups it was suggested that services will only be accessed if young people understand the nature of problematic use and the mums of users interviews stated firmly that young people will only engage with services when they are motivated to do so. This implies a need to assess young people and target services appropriately, providing motivational work to engage young people in the process of considering the impacts of cannabis use on their lives. For those who need/want to change then exit strategies can be planned and supported by services. For those who conclude that their use is not problematic a harm minimisation approach is more appropriate.

Services for young people, in particular education, need to be delivered by the correct person. Positive role models and peer mentors are highlighted as good practice, both of which would require appropriate training for the mentors. Cannabis users appear to like the idea of voluntarily accessed education, and a 'cannabis information bus' which attends locations frequented by young people is seen as good practice here. Professionals say that services also need to follow young people through the transition to adulthood and be holistic, recognising the diverse needs that young adults who use cannabis problematically may have.

Services also need to ensure that they target needs appropriately to make themselves attractive to service users. This means choosing the correct approach and providing the type of services that cannabis users in particular are likely to need. This means listening to (potential) service users and professionals who work with them to find out what different groups require (for example, despite the current national focus on recovery in national policy, professionals find that young people need harm reduction advice and support).

In terms of gender few feel that there is a need for separate services for males and females, in fact such siloing is thought to be detrimental as one service may lose track of what another provides and best practice may not be shared. Whilst separate services are not necessary, there are some gendered needs identified which might be taken into consideration when planning groups: The need for privacy, i.e. to be able to attend without being identified as a service user, particularly for parents and specifically for women; the need to consider potentially gendered patterns of use; the need to provide a range service provision types and therapies as different people, and specifically different genders, are felt to have different needs and the need to consider the overrepresentation of males in some groups.

Importantly the need is identified by a number of professionals to treat cannabis use holistically and not focus solely on drugs, which in general is a symptom rather than cause of many of the problems people experience. In essence services need to consider what is lost by users when they desist from cannabis use (status, a means to relax and so on) and make efforts to replace these with more productive/less harmful activities.

Service availability and provision: Cultivation

Professionals suggest that responses to cultivation are currently the remit principally of those who police (in the broadest sense) cultivation. Namely it is felt that the Police and housing professionals take this responsibility. Stronger Families are to a lesser extent suggested to have a role in responses to cannabis cultivation but the nature of their work and admission criteria do not seem to be common knowledge. Some suggest that perhaps a more coordinated, recognised strategy, which outlines the responsibilities and roles of all agencies should be developed in order to ensure all related issues are tackled.

Some professionals say they simply lack knowledge around cultivation services and this is demonstrated by suggestions by some that no work is done around cannabis cultivation, or at least that no services have specific responsibilities for responding to the issue. This highlights that even when services exist, without knowledge exchange, professionals may simply be unaware of the activities of other agencies (referred to in the 'Advertising of Services: Cultivation' section).

In terms of good practice, the police 'shop front' is mentioned on a number of occasions, where it appears that people were able to go and ask questions and receive information on cannabis cultivation. Most feel this was an excellent education channel and did much to stimulate public interest and knowledge, not least thanks to its non-threatening and informative approach to education, which is similar to the 'cannabis information bus' referred to above (see 'Education: Cultivation' section for further discussion).

Advertising of services: Use

Most practitioners say that neither they nor the public they encounter in their day to day work are clear on what the best response is for users i.e. where to refer people who encounter problems with cannabis. Parents in particular have unmet needs in that they seek help but even people who work in young people's services do not know where to send them for support or advice. This is strongly supported by the interviews with mums who say they have sought support but are unable to identify which agencies can help or work out whose admission criteria they fit in with. Evidently the issues around service provision relate in part to be lack of availability but also due to lack of service advertising. Professionals and the public need to know what is available and for whom in the borough. It is suggested that advertising opportunities, whilst available, are being overlooked, including local magazines such as the Knowledge and local newspapers and websites.

In terms of a way forward it is clear that a multi-agency approach is required by professionals to tackle cannabis use and that agencies need information on what services are available, clear lines of responsibility and admission criteria i.e. who has the remit for which elements of intervention and for which groups (by age, gender, tenancy and so on). This data could usefully be stored on the council website so that both the public and professionals are aware of what is available and for whom. Such a database needs regular updating to keep all interested parties abreast of changes to involved agencies.

Advertising of services: Cultivation

Apart from the police, housing and Stronger Families, professionals are not aware of any services with direct responsibility for cannabis cultivation or who could provide services to those involved. Again, some of this is about a lack of specific provision but also about a lack of advertising. It is also suggested that the issue of cannabis cultivation is perhaps unspoken in public forums and advertising deliberately, due to a desire to conceal the issue. A number of staff feel that the need to promote Knowsley as a 'Borough of Choice' sometimes eclipses the need to deal realistically with social matters which need attention.

Notably, residents reported that they too are concerned about what reports of cannabis cultivation do to the image of their area, feeling that 'cannabis news' eclipses the good things that the people of Knowsley achieve. There does not need to be a decision between acknowledging and confronting social problems however – the solution is about balance. One community group offered just such a solution in their suggestion that the council should use the power of the media to balance their advertising of cannabis services (i.e. de facto admission of such issues) by advertising the excellent work that communities do in the area, particularly in the community centres. In this way Knowsley can demonstrate itself to be an holistic 'Borough of Choice' which celebrates community successes whilst confronting real issues by equipping its residents with the education to make appropriate and informed choices and information about services.

Professionals did not identify a clear way forward for cultivation services but one suggestion was that there should be a dual purpose telephone service which in part, like CrimeStoppers, can be contacted anonymously to report cultivation and which both the public and professionals can contact in order to get information on appropriate responses and agency responsibilities.

Education: Use

Education was seen by mums, the community, users and professionals as crucial in responding to cannabis use.

Education for professionals

Professionals both identify and demonstrate a range of education needs. They are aware of higher levels of cannabis use as previous sections demonstrate, but are not sure of the extent to which this use is problematic, something they feel they need to know in order to be able to respond appropriately to the issue. Relatedly, they need definitions of what is problematic and how this is to be assessed, again in order to respond appropriately to reports of use. This information needs to be supported by up-to-date and accurate information on what responses are available for cannabis use, i.e. the most suitable forms of treatment and intervention.

In particular, professionals need facts around cannabis so that they are able to check the viability of received information and to identify part truths and misconceptions. For example, professionals suggest that there has been significant change in the contemporary cannabis market and 'products,' namely the increased availability and use of skunk. However, there is evidence of a self-confessed need for accurate information here in that whilst skunk is indeed stronger than resin, the level of increased strength discussed in the World Café is over-emphasised, with suggestions that the THC levels of traditional cannabis or resin is 40% and modern skunk is 40-60% or even 'ten times stronger'. Yet research for the EMCDDA (King, 2008) found that THCs have not dramatically increased, confirmed in other research suggesting an average of 16.2% THC in skunk and 5.9% in resin (Hardwick and King, 2008). It is important that professionals have recognised the increased use of and strength of skunk compared to resin, but more information is needed for accuracy and with regard to the likely short and long term effects of this.

Similarly, one or two professionals suggest that skunk is not cannabis (when skunk is a strong strain of cannabis) and that skunk is a Semillion (which is wine made from Semillon grapes. The reference may actually be to Sinsemilla,

which are strong strains of cannabis produced through intensive cultivation methods, see Hardwick and King, 2008). These misconceptions in themselves are without significant consequence, but do demonstrate the point made by many professionals that education is crucial in order for them to maintain credibility with clients.

In a couple of cases, professionals suggest that skunk is produced by adulteration using Class A drugs. This is unlikely as it is both cost ineffective and would produce withdrawal in cannabis users, of which there are no reports from the professionals. This is supported by research that found 96.1% of cannabis samples were indeed simply cannabis (Hardwick and King, 2008). Cultivators also confirm this in that they say it would be 'bad for business' i.e. self-cancelling, as people will not buy from a dealer who fails to provide them with the product they intended to purchase or indeed something which causes withdrawal. An example of any adulteration being self-cancelling is demonstrated by a situation reported by the cultivators in which sand and fibreglass were added to bags of cheap imported cannabis some years ago. The reports say that shaking the bag decanted the adulterants to the bottom, resulting in an escalation in complaints to dealers. Dealers then refused to buy from that supplier again and within a couple of weeks, the adulterated cannabis had left the market and has not been seen since.

In terms of good practice, professionals in some services are beginning to gather knowledge about consumption from those who know most about it i.e. users themselves. Combined with a collation of information on cannabis strength and effects from contemporary research, this knowledge is something which could usefully be shared amongst agencies.

Education for young people

There appear to be two underlying rationales as to why drugs education is seen as so important for young people. Firstly, as a preventative measure, mums, communities and professionals say that young people are growing up with cannabis all around them so they need to be educated in its existence and effects so that they can make an informed choice of whether to use the drug or not.

Secondly, as a harm reduction measure, young people need to be provided with a balanced account of cannabis in order to use safely should they decide to do so. Professionals supported this view feeling that early intervention is critical as indeed is harm minimisation since a number of young people will use regardless of preventative work. This reflects that, particularly in areas where cannabis use is prevalent, each young person is going to have to make a decision about whether to use cannabis or not and so will need to be 'drug wise' (Parker et al 1998). Professionals suggest that harm reduction work may meet resistance, particularly in schools, as many educational establishments do not wish to acknowledge their problems. However, education policy needs to focus on likely outcomes. Hiding issues results in a lack of knowledge which is highly likely to be more dangerous than the provision of information and the equipping of young people to make informed decisions. Where this does not happen, a void is left which can be filled with uninformed and indeed dangerous information. Communities support this view, suggesting that whilst parents can provide some information it is crucial that this is also provided professionally through the education system, especially in light of the acceptance of and desensitisation to use evident in some parts of the borough.

Professionals debated the need to employ 'Scared straight' tactics in drug education with some suggesting this is vital, whilst others cite failed historical campaigns which suggest this is not the correct approach. Most feel 'scared straight' strategies fail because they lack credibility with young people, essentially misinforming on the reality of risk and failing to take account of young people's extant knowledge and experiences of drug use and risk management in general, resultantly failing to be meaningful. All professional groups agree that there is a need to know what works, both nationally and internationally as well as at a local level in their own area.

Professionals feel that education needs to be the appropriate ethos and correct messages delivered by the right people. There was some discussion about whether or not the police are the correct agency to deliver such messages, particularly in view of their enforcement commitments which can make it difficult to offer a holistic or harm minimisation approach. An enforcement approach and a focus on the long term risks of cannabis use can be problematic. In short, young people do take risks as this is how they learn what is possible in the world, a learning

method developed early in childhood, meaning the role of drug education is to make such decisions on risk taking a balanced and considered test of what they want.

Good practice suggestions include the use of informed peer mentors, and ensuring that education sessions tap in to young people's creativity as well as employing open debate and discussion, honesty and addressing immediate rather than long term concerns and impacts. The latter is particularly important for young people as a focus on tangible, immediate or at least short-term impacts is consistent with the time frame in which young people are more likely to live in and be able to conceptualise. Longer term risks about the future are likely to be seen as unrealistic or not likely enough to outweigh the current gains.

Crucially, it is felt that education and services need to be realistic in terms of acknowledging what young people currently have, do not have and the benefits they currently see in using cannabis. This suggests that education needs to be a conversation or an exchange rather than a 'fact' giving didactic. It also suggests the need for a holistic approach in terms of structurally meeting needs and providing attractive services and opportunities for alternatives to cannabis use which many young people either do not see or indeed do not have.

Education for adults/parents

Professionals feel that there is a need for education for adults, in particular parents, both to help them make their own decisions around cannabis use and to support them in responding to the activities of their children. It is felt that some parents need information to counter their over-estimates of the risks of cannabis use (including gateway theory) and some, in contrast need to be alerted to dangers that they may not grasp, for example the potentially different risks of stronger cannabis.

As with young people, education for adults around cannabis use should be accurate, up to date and balanced, as well as presented in a way that stimulates interest rather than feels imposed. In particular, education involving unique methods of delivery and indeed an entertainment element are more likely to make people want to engage.

Education: Cultivation

It seems that currently, a large number of services (particularly those outside of the police and housing) have little in terms of education around cultivation, either for themselves or to offer to their service users. A number of education needs around cannabis cultivation are identified both for the public and professionals, including information clarifying the law, advice on identifying and reporting cultivation, and harm prevention/minimisation information with regard to the (mis)use of electricity, debt risks, fume, exploitation and social repercussions.

The focus groups suggest that professionals, need an accurate idea of the scale of the issue of cultivation in Knowsley as well as a clear map of what the response to this should be i.e. who should be involved, what they need to do and who has responsibility for the strategy.

In terms of education about cultivation itself, the police 'Cannabis Shop Front' is again highlighted as good practice in terms of engaging the public and indeed professionals in an informal but informative way. People seem much more receptive to information that is given in a way that generates genuine interest rather than feeling imposed.

Notably, the police initiatives around the legal aspects of cannabis cultivation are the only education services identified by professionals or the community groups. This is a concern both in terms of the need to cover all aspects of education around cannabis cultivation including social, health and legal (not all of which are the remit or specialism of the police) and the capacity for agencies to continue with preventative work such as this (as outlined in the Infrastructure section below).

At a more structural level, as with cannabis use, education around cannabis cultivation is likely to fail unless people, particularly young people, have realistic alternatives. That means working both to help people identify opportunities

outside of cultivation as a means of income as well as stimulating the reality of such opportunities by providing training courses, employment and support.

Infrastructure (funding and restructuring): Use and cultivation

For both use and cultivation services a great deal of concern is expressed at the recent changes in service provision and the potential loss or reduction in service provision. In essence professionals want stability i.e. financial support for strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective. The main concern here is that the preventative element of services is lost in times of austerity. It was also clear that the consequence of instability was the loss of some effective initiatives, particularly those with a preventive remit, whose work is crucial but whose impacts are more difficult to demonstrate.

Ethos (enforcement, support, legalisation): Use and cultivation

A bifurcation is highlighted in the focus groups in that cannabis use tends to be dealt with by support whereas the response to cultivation is primarily enforcement through the police and housing associations.

There are clear tensions for professionals in deciding the best approach to take in response to cultivation i.e. whether enforcement or support is most appropriate, tensions which exist both within and between agencies. Many note that enforcement responses have limited effectiveness because deterrence alone simply does not work, demonstrated by the fact that many continue to offend despite enforcement action. The reasons for this are that the criminal justice costs do not appear to outweigh the financial benefits and relatedly, because enforcement is seen alone as failing to tackle root causes.

Many feel that enforcement and deterrence actually make the problem worse in their failure to tackle the underlying issues i.e. that cultivation and use are symptoms more than causes of social problems and a large proportion of cultivators need support due to their vulnerability, either in terms of economic instability or simply their risk of exploitation for a range of reasons from mental health to debt.

There are related concerns that policing (in the broadest sense) of cultivation can add significantly to it's the social risks of use and cultivation, for example in terms of loss of tenancy and its related social problems, as well as people hiding mental health problems for fear it will be linked to cannabis use and they will lose their children, home and so on. Similarly, actions taken to avoid detection can in fact increase the risks associated with cultivation, for example people growing in children's bedrooms rather than lofts as the police scan roofs for heat.

Essentially it seems case by case assessment and approach is required to identify the enforcement and support needs balance for every user and cultivator. This balancing enforcement and support is important as it acknowledges rights and obligations on the part of the state and of individuals as well as attempts to ensure that those who are already vulnerable (particularly coerced cultivators) are not re-victimised.

A number of professionals feel that the most appropriate response to use and cultivation is legalisation, at least of possession and small scale cultivation. It is felt that this pragmatic approach would remove the issues of criminalisation, vulnerability, victimisation and exploitation and reduce the proceeds for larger scale offenders. Interestingly this is supported by the fact that most of the cultivators interviewed were keen for cultivation not to be made legal, presumably due to the likelihood that if people grow their own, larger scale cultivators who grow to sell would be out of work.

The way forward: A multi-agency approach with collectively agreed strategy and responsibilities

The main recommendations from professionals with regard to a way forward, both for cannabis use and cultivation is a multi-agency one, in which partners have collectively agreed strategies, specific roles which all agencies

subscribe to and regular meetings and/or updates to refresh, reinvigorate and maintain up-to-date policy and service provision. This is an important suggestion as drug 'knowledge,' the drug scene and drug services clearly change continually meaning that information for professionals needs to be updated on a regular (even if only biannual) basis. In order to achieve this an information gathering exercise is required, both to collate up to date knowledge on services in Knowsley and up to date and credible research and education on cannabis in all its forms so that they can move forward in an informed way which draws in, and instils confidence in, service users.

Conclusions

The findings of the research suggest two key areas of intervention which will benefit from renewed strategy and planning:

Education

This requirement was first and foremost education, for a range of groups and purposes.

1. Information is needed both by professionals and the public (in particular young people and parents) in order for each to consider their own respective responses to cannabis use and cultivation. To achieve this, an information gathering exercise is required to identify accurate data and research on:
 - a. The nature of cannabis and particularly stronger breeds
 - b. The true scale of cannabis use and cultivation
 - c. How to identify (problematic) use
 - d. How to detect cultivation
 - e. The differences between cultivation and dealing
 - f. The nature of the causes and effects of use and cultivation (a topic on which users and cultivators themselves are important sources of knowledge)
 - g. Appropriate responses to use and cultivation.

2. Once compiled, the information needs to be shared. The format of this education needs to be of an appropriate nature for the target groups, namely:
 - a. For professionals
 - i. Timely, accessible and contemporary information is needed and this needs to be and updated regularly in order to maintain credibility with service users
 - b. For the public/parents
 - i. Voluntary and easily available access are important (the Police 'Cannabis Shop Front' was felt to be good practice)
 - c. For children
 - i. Early education is needed to prevent the harm through absent or misconceived knowledge
 - d. For young people
 - i. Realistic, informed and non-didactic education sessions are needed, delivered by credible educators (informed peers were suggested), on a regular basis, which aim to reduce harm and take account of their lived experiences.

Service provision

A number of service provision needs were identified, including:

1. The provision of specialist cannabis services which acknowledge the specific nature of the drug and its users

- a. Recognising the different social perceptions of cannabis (more acceptable and less 'dirty' than other illicit drugs) and potentially less criminogenic (or at least with different relationships to, and links to, different types of crime)
 - b. Recognising the need for some to access help in private/confidentially to avoid stigma
 - c. Recognising the lack of current medical intervention and focusing instead on relaxation and social structural interventions in order to secure an alternative identity and use of time for users, such as leisure, education and employment services
2. The provision of support services, particularly for parents
 - a. From the data it is clear that some people, particularly parents, in Knowsley are living in fear. There are a scale of needs from those who feel obliged to cultivate in order to clear their own or children's debts (from drugs but equally from daily living costs) through to those whose (adult) children exhibit a range of severe social problems, including lack of stable housing and employment, drug use (namely cannabis), developmental issues, mental health issues, aggression and domestic violence. These services need to be confidential, secure and widely advertised
 3. A need to balance the respective ethos' of enforcement and support. Cultivation raises a demand for services, which may include enforcement/policing but which also demand support, particularly in view of the vulnerable nature of many of the cultivators. It is no coincidence that domestic cultivation has increased in times of socio-economic hardship and policy cannot punish its way out of the related issues. There are equally considerations of community and people's right to live away from drug use and production, as well as genuine risks to cultivators and in particular to parents and young people. A strategy which can be tailored in terms of enforcement and support provision on a case by case basis is therefore crucial here
 4. Appropriate screening tools are import to identify what is and is not problematic use and what is (or should be) the tolerance levels for the policing of cultivation. This would limit avoidable criminalisation and excessive or unwarranted service intervention, both of which are issues of human rights as well as financially important in terms of targeting interventions to people/areas of most need
 5. A common strategy and multiagency communication for both cannabis use and cultivation. This need was identified in almost all focus groups, in order that all services are aware of each other's responsibilities, capacity, criteria and referral routes. Both professionals and the public would then know who to turn to for help and what the best responses are, for cannabis use and cultivation respectively. Such a strategy would also limit the extremes of service gaps and service duplication. To achieve this, a scoping exercise is needed to find out what services are available in Knowsley, in particular
 - a. What is currently available and referral criteria and routes
 - b. Current duplication in services or (more likely) gaps, since currently staff data suggests they are not clear whether services simply do not exist or they are just unaware of them
 - c. What (prospective) service users feel would make services both useful and attractive so that providers can respond accordingly
 6. An advertising and marketing campaign in accessible places (council website, local papers and shopping centres)
 - a. Including information on services
 - i. So that professionals know who to refer to
 - ii. So the public know where to go for help with regard to use and cultivation
 - b. Acknowledging concerns that the publication of information on cannabis might spoil the identity of Knowsley, it could perhaps be offset / balanced in media representations through increased reporting on the progressive and constructive activities taking place in the borough, in particular in the Community Centres.
 - c. Including socio-political cultural considerations such as community perceptions and 'tolerance' of cannabis use and cultivation and wider police-community relations, in order to provide appropriate reporting mechanisms
 - i. This may include ensuring the public know the impacts of their reporting i.e. the outcome of service interventions (e.g. arrest rates, numbers of people accessing services).

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