

Offenders to face mandatory testing to cut drug-fuelled crime

- new enhanced tests will detect more drugs to tackle substance abuse and cut crime
- offenders who fail tests face being recalled to prison

Thousands of offenders will face compulsory drug testing after release from prison to help keep them clean and cut drug-fuelled crime.

From today (3 October 2022), offenders supervised in probation hostels, known as Approved Premises, will be randomly tested for 14 different types of drugs as part of a £1.2 million initiative to reduce reoffending.

Offenders whose drug habits are directly linked to their crimes, such as heroin addicts, will be legally required to take a urine test up to once a week to prevent their addiction from spiralling into further crimes. All other offenders will be tested at least twice whilst being supervised in Approved Premises.

New enhanced tests will also make it easier to spot a range of drugs including heroin, cocaine and synthetic substances like Spice, with around 30,000 tests being carried out each year.

Those who test positive will be required to undergo intensive drug treatment or face being recalled to prison.

These changes were first introduced as a Private Members Bill by Rob Butler MP, who recently became Prisons and Probation Minister.

Rob Butler, Prisons and Probation Minister, said:

I've seen first-hand how drug addiction is too often at the heart of criminal activity and I have campaigned to change that.

This mandatory testing will act as a deterrent to anyone tempted to abuse drugs again, help cut crime and make our communities safer.

Illegal drug use costs the taxpayer nearly £22 billion each year, including NHS, prison and police costs. Clamping down on drug use will help break the cycle of crime which addiction causes.

This type of testing has been successfully rolled out in dozens of Approved Premises in England and will now be expanded across the whole estate by spring 2023.

'Ian', an offender currently housed in an Approved Premise, said:

Before I got clean from drugs, my life was chaotic, and I would do anything to get my next hit.

Regular testing in Approved Premises will reduce drug deaths and give people something to focus on and work towards.

At first, I was worried about being tested for fear of being recalled to prison but it was an incentive for me to stay clean, rebuild broken trust with family and loved ones and start applying for jobs so I can look for my own place.

The initiative represents one of the largest expansions of drug testing in the Probation Service and supports the government's wider 10-year Drugs Strategy which is backed by £900 million of extra investment.

As part of this, the government is investing £120 million to roll out three pilot substance misuse problem-solving courts in the community to make offenders face their addictions. The investment will help establish 18 new drug recovery wings ensuring prisoners tackle their addiction head-on or face tough consequences – including further time in jail where necessary.

Approved Premises are used by the Probation Service to closely supervise and support offenders after their release from prison.