



CRISPIN BLUNT MP
Member of Parliament for Reigate

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

26th November 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

This letter follows on from our meeting on 27th May 2021, and presents you with new polling data, unpublished elsewhere, commissioned by the Conservative Drug Policy Reform Group Ltd (CDPRG), revealing that the majority of MPs (even within the Conservative party) believe that it is time to update the drug laws based on evidence. These insights on current MP perspectives on drug policy inform the enclosed proposal, *"Making UK drug policy a success: reforming the policymaking process"*. Drug policy across the world is shifting, and following the commission of Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs along with the upcoming Drug Strategy, the time is right for us to grasp this complex area of policy once and for all and reap the enormous opportunities that getting this right will bring to the UK.

- **Polling results increasingly show that evidence-based drug policies would be welcomed by the majority of MPs.** This includes the majority of Conservative MPs polled, the Parliamentary demographic traditionally associated with the greatest resistance to innovation in this area — 72% agree the process of making policy around controlled drugs should make more use of evidence and research; 75% share the sentiment that policy about controlled drugs is such a controversial issue that it can be difficult to have an objective debate about the best solutions; and 85% (and 90% of all MPs polled) agree that improved cross-departmental coordination would better help to tackle the health, crime, and social problems associated with controlled drugs.
- **The enclosed report explores in detail the creation of a cross-departmental structure from which the Government will have the capacity to establish key principles of good governance in drug policy.** In it, the CDPRG analyses how existing policymaking practices expose recurrent methodological flaws. These have traditionally led directly to the creation of policies which are not sufficiently evidence-based, which have aims that are unachievable, and/or unintended outcomes.
 - The proposal is intended to scale up the Government capacity to make better designed drug policies, with outcomes that can be more confidently anticipated.
 - The CDPRG's focus on developing capacity to rethink policymaking — as opposed to making recommendations for particular changes to drug policy itself — takes into account that there are many aspects where sufficient evidence exists to confirm that current policy is ineffective, but more research is needed before policymakers can be equipped to devise improvement.



- It is designed to be of the most support possible to the implementation of the recommendations in Dame Carol Black's *Independent Review of Drugs Part 2*, whose input has been key to the forthcoming drugs strategy. The remit of her inquiry did not extend to discussing the legislative reforms required to realise her recommendations. However, this proposal creates the capacity from which to close this serious review gap. Indeed, upgrading the processes by which future policy changes are conceived increases the potential to depart from the unachieved outcomes of past drug policies.

The polling results are an excellent backdrop to the launch of the Joint Combating Drugs Unit (JCDU), and indeed this policy proposal is intended to be a companion to the JCDU by providing a blueprint for upgrading the current policymaking processes. Beyond this, it indicates possible operational structures conducive to including expertise from additional departments. This will afford the UK Government the ability to operate with agility and flexibility in delivering specialised policy responses that are as sophisticated as is warranted by the complexity of the issues to be resolved – including taxation, bioscience industry, agriculture, business innovation, exports and imports, as well as crime, justice, treatment and rehabilitation.

I am aware that the new UK drugs strategy will be published imminently. Wider consultation leading to its composition has been limited, and there is resistance to making systemic changes to Government machinery. I send this proposal which fundamentally updates the nature of evidence-generation to inform drug policymaking despite these caveats, which I hope are offset by the evident strength of MP support for change in this area. It is intended to help Ministers consider effective drug policy measures, including the adoption of measures implemented successfully abroad that could be adapted for use in the UK.

I also take this opportunity to explain that the CDPRG Ltd is a think tank I set up to enable evidence-based drug policy and assist colleagues in this fraught area. Whilst I am the group's unremunerated Chair, I am not a shareholder and I have no financial interest in either the group or any aspect of drug policy.

It is my intention to publicise the polling data and report, however I remain open to discussing with you and your advisors the best possible use of it. I look forward to hearing from you.

John
Cairns

Cc:

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP, Minister for Crime and Policing.

Ms Munira Mirza, Director of the Number 10 Policy Unit.

Mr Logan Graham, Mr James Phillips and Ms Hannah Guerin, Special Advisers.

Ms Rachel Millar, Lead Official, Drug Strategy.