

Resort receives national praise for exceptional drugs treatment

Addicts winning crime cycle battle



KEY PRAISE: The council's efforts are playing a crucial role in crime reduction, says Coun Sue Wright (inset) – and now one of its schemes has earned national plaudits

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BLACKPOOL'S groundbreaking steps to get drug addicted criminals back on the straight and narrow has won national praise.

The resort's Community Safety and Drugs Partnership has been commended by the Home Office and National Treatment Agency for its "exceptional" performance.

As one of the highest performing Drug Intervention Programmes (DIPs) in the country, the scheme aims to get offenders who commit crime to pay for their habit off the streets and into treatment.

By offering them access to tailored rehabilitation programmes, addicts have the chance to get out of the cycle of crime and become a part of society again.

In a letter from the Government Office North West and The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, Blackpool was commended for the number of people who are successfully accessing drug intervention schemes. Paolo Pertica, head of

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the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership said: "People often have a turning point in their criminal activity when they realise they need professional treatment for their drug habit.

"What's promising is that people now realise quality support is available, and, importantly they want it."

The commendation shows how far the town has come in making improvements to drug treatment services.

Five years ago, Blackpool was deemed as the one of the worst areas in the North West for drug services, with some of the longest waiting times and some of the highest rates of drug related deaths.

But now the hard work has seen drug treatment services built that are as good as, if not ahead, of other areas in the region.

In 2003/04, the team's target was set at getting 1,053 people into treatment. It beat that by 30 people.

Last year the target was upped by the Government to 1,148, but again Blackpool Community Safety and Drugs Partnership outperformed expectations and saw 1,338 users.

Coun Sue Wright, Cabinet member for Community Safety at Blackpool Council, said: "Not only can people seek professional help to kick their addiction for good, but the service also gives them a realistic chance of turning their back on the destructive temptations of crime."

"We've significantly reduced the waiting times for people needing drug treatment, and we are now well on the way to becoming the region's top performer."

Importantly, our efforts are also playing a crucial role in crime reduction."

Wendy Swift, chief executive of the Blackpool Primary Care Trust, said: "Substance misuse is one of the priorities of the PCT and its partners."

"Providing opportunities for treatment - especially for those substance misusers committing crime - is key to bringing tangible health improvement and lifestyle change to individual users and their families, and will ultimately benefit the wider community."