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## PRESS RELEASE

### **The UK's first regular drug checking service set to launch in Bristol this month**

The UK's first Home Office licensed regular drug checking service is set to launch in Bristol this month, delivered by leading non-profit harm reduction organisation The Loop. In partnership with Bristol City Council, The Loop will be bringing its pioneering service, which combines personalised health advice with drug testing, to central Bristol.

To be funded by Bristol City Council, operated by The Loop's team of professional chemists and healthcare workers, and run in a multi-agency partnership with Bristol Drugs Project (BDP) and The People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC), the trailblazing evidence-based health service aims to reduce high risk drug-taking and build a fuller picture of the illicit drug market in the local area.

Illicit substances can be tested, with testing proven to reduce drug-related harm. Completely confidential and free to access, it is set to open its doors for the first time on 28th May 2022 and will run once a month, with additional opening hours around significant local events.

Professor Fiona Measham (Director of The Loop and Chair in Criminology at the University of Liverpool):

*As the first and only dedicated drug checking service provider in the UK, The Loop has been working for nearly a decade to establish regular drug checking services direct to the public and we are extremely grateful to the Home Office for issuing the licence to be able to offer this vital service. The Loop has a proven track record of designing and delivering evidence-based innovative interventions to engage with people otherwise not in touch with health services and to support them in making safer choices. Furthermore, the intelligence on local drug markets gained from drug checking is shared with stakeholders to inform emergency services, public health surveillance networks, and wider drug using communities. We would also like to thank our local partners for their support in introducing this groundbreaking multi-agency initiative.*

The new drug testing service aligns with the aspirations set out in the Bristol Drug and Alcohol strategy. Bristol City Councillor Ellie King, Cabinet Lead for Public Health, Communities, and Bristol One City said:



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*“We welcome The Loop’s successful application for a Home Office licence for a new Drug Testing Service for Bristol which is an innovative approach to saving lives and reducing harm to our communities. As the first city in the UK to have a regular drug checking service in the heart of the city we will be able to provide communities with access to factual, scientific, evidence-based information about drugs they may consume and that are in circulation throughout the wider city. This, alongside the one-on-one trained healthcare consultation, will empower people to make safer, informed decisions and access drug treatment and further support. Bristol is leading the way in this public health approach to keeping people safe around drugs shows that, as a city, we put our people’s wellbeing at the forefront of decision making.”*

Drug checking services have operated successfully across Europe for four decades and have been piloted in UK cities and events by The Loop since 2016. Drug checking provides a vital opportunity for people to access accurate, timely, and relevant information to make more informed decisions about drugs. Service users surrender substances of concern for laboratory analysis by chemists and the results are shared with them as part of a personalised health consultation with a health professional.

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#### Notes to Editors:

##### How will it work?

Service users take substances of concern to BDP, place them into an amnesty box on the ground floor, then about an hour later go to PRSC where they receive individually tailored, non-judgemental healthcare consultations and test results from health professionals. In that intervening hour, a pop-up lab in BDP will analyse the substance using a number of chemical tests to identify the contents and strength of the substance of concern. The laboratory has a Home Office licence to handle controlled drugs.

#### **Additional Information:**

**Location:** The sample drop-off and Loop pop-up laboratory are located at Bristol Drug Project. The healthcare consultations will take place at PRSC.

**When:** Once per month for a year, on payday weekend, the last weekend of the month, plus additionally ahead of Pride, LSTD, and the festive season.

**Who:** The Loop is providing the drug checking service funded by Bristol City Council, using Bristol Drugs Project and PRSC premises.



[wearetheloop.org](http://wearetheloop.org)

**HO licence:** This is the first Home Office licensed *regular* drug checking service in the UK (the only previous HO licensed drug checking service was a small 4-day pilot in Weston Super Mare, of which The Loop was a partner).

**Set up for service users:** Service users take substances of concern to BDP, surrender them into an amnesty box on the ground floor, then an hour later go to PRSC where they receive healthcare consultations and test results from health professionals. In that intervening hour, a pop-up lab in BDP will analyse the substance using a number of chemical tests to identify the contents and strength of the substance of concern for harm reduction purposes and to provide drug market monitoring information to emergency and support services across the city.

**Please note:** No drugs are returned to service users, only information regarding the substance and professional healthcare advice.