Item No. 7

Meeting Date **Wednesday 11th November 2026**

Glasgow City Integration Joint Board Public Engagement Committee

Report By: **Kelda Gaffney, Depute Chief Officer (Operations and Governance) and Chief Social Work Officer**

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The Thistle (Safer Drug Consumption Facility) – Engagement Update

Purpose of Report:	The purpose of the report is to update the IJB Public Engagement Committee on the continued engagement with key stakeholders for the Thistle service, Glasgow's safer drug consumption facility (SDCF).

Background/Engagement:	The IJB approved the implementation of a Safer Drug Consumption Facility in Glasgow City in September 2023. The Public Engagement Committee (PEC) was tasked with monitoring community engagement and has approved an annual update. The PEC was last updated in August 2025.

Governance Route:	The matters contained within this paper have been previously considered by the following group(s) as part of its development. HSCP Senior Management Team ☐ Council Corporate Management Team ☐ Health Board Corporate Management Team ☐ Council Committee ☐ Update requested by IJB ☐ Other ☒ SDCF Oversight Board Not Applicable ☐

Recommendations:	The IJB Public Engagement Committee is asked to: a) Note the contents of the report; and b) Agree that The Thistle lead officers continue to provide updates on engagement activity to the PEC as necessary and no less frequently than once per year.

Relevance to Integration Joint Board Strategic Plan:
The implementation of the Safer Drug Consumption Facility (SDCF) will support the IJB/HSCP to meet the Vision and Partnership Priorities laid out within the Strategic Plan 2023-28. In particular the Thistle will support the priorities of: Prevention, early intervention and well-being; Supporting greater self-determination and informed choice; Supporting people in their communities and; Strengthening communities to reduce harm.

Implications for Health and Social Care Partnership:

Reference to National Health & Wellbeing Outcome:	The Thistle will contribute to meeting the following health and wellbeing outcomes for health and social care services: People who use health and social care services have positive experiences of those services, and have their dignity respected; Health and social care services are centred on helping to maintain or improve the quality of life of people who use those services; Health and social care services contribute to reducing health inequalities; People who use health and social care service are safe from harm.

Personnel:	The Thistle multi-disciplinary staff team is run with its full complement of staff managed by a Glasgow Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services (GADRS) Service Manager

Carers:	Family members and carer representatives continue to engage on service developments via the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) Families Reference group

Provider Organisations:	Provider organisations are active members of the Thistle Community Engagement Forum. Implications for provider organisations are considered through the Thistle Oversight Board.

Equalities:	An EQIA has been completed and published and has informed engagement activity to date. This was reviewed in January 2024 following further engagement and has been updated since the service became operational.

Fairer Scotland Compliance:	In offering a safer environment for injecting drugs, co-located with a range of supports, the service reduces both community harms and individual harms, having a positive socio economic impact on the area.

Financial:	The financial framework for the operational costs for the three year pilot has been met by the Scottish Government, and operational costs are being delivered

	within this financial envelope. Full details are included in the report presented to IJB in June 2025. The Thistle service could potentially result in reduced costs for other parts of the health, social care and criminal justice system, including Acute, Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland. A full report regarding planning for future funding will be presented to a future IJB.

Legal:	The Thistle is delivered alongside other Alcohol and Drug treatment services aimed at reducing harms and providing pathways into treatment, care and recovery. Operational policies are strictly adhered to and monitored closely. King's Counsel opinion confirmed that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council staff can deliver the facility within existing legislation. The Lord Advocate has provided a public statement of prosecution policy, so that service users will not be prosecuted for possession of drugs whilst using the Safer Drug Consumption Facility.

Economic Impact:	There may be economic benefits to the city as a result of the reduction in drug injecting in public places and a reduction in drug-related litter being visible on the streets. Any economic impact experienced will be considered as part of the independent evaluation.

Sustainability:	None.

Sustainable Procurement and Article 19:	None.

Risk Implications:	The implementation and delivery of the first SDCF in the UK carries with it a degree of reputational risk for Glasgow City Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City IJB. Such risks are identified, monitored and mitigated through the Thistle Oversight Board and will continue to be monitored via appropriate governance routes.

Implications for Glasgow City Council:	There are a number of implications for both Glasgow City Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, including political and reputational impacts, positive impacts on the local community and media attention. There may also be increased demand for support services as a result of successful engagement with a cohort of vulnerable individuals with severe and multiple disadvantages. Resource implications may be offset by a reduction in demand for unscheduled care services such as acute

	health services and crisis / emergency social care services.

Implications for NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde:	There are a number of implications for both Glasgow City Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, including political and reputational impacts, positive impacts on the local community and media attention. There may also be increased demand for support services as a result of successful engagement with a cohort of vulnerable individuals with severe and multiple disadvantages. Resource implications may be offset by a reduction in demand for unscheduled care services such as acute health services and crisis / emergency social care services.

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update the IJB Public Engagement Committee on the continued engagement with key stakeholders for the Thistle service, Glasgow's safer drug consumption facility.

2. Background

2.1. The Thistle Communication and Engagement subgroup, chaired by the Alcohol and Drug Recovery Service (ADRS) Associate Medical Director, continues to meet every 6 weeks and report into the Thistle Oversight Board**.** Membership includes representation from the Crown Office, Scottish Government, the Thistle Service User Forum, the Thistle Community Engagement Forum and service leads.

2.2 The Safer Drug Consumption Facility webpage continues to be updated with service data monthly with a dashboard detailing number of attendances, number of injecting episodes, substances used. The webpage also includes Glasgow City Council Neighborhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability (NRS) data on the collections of discarded needles as and when this is shared.

3. Thistle Community Engagement Forum

3.1 The Thistle Community Engagement Forum (TCEF) was established prior to the opening of the service in January 2025 and continues to meet in person in the Calton Heritage Centre. The forum is chaired by the Associate Medical Director ADRS. Membership includes Police Scotland, local residents, local businesses, Elected Members, Community Councils, NRS, Registered Social landlords, the North East Recovery Community and the Thistle project leads. Meetings alternate between afternoon and evening to allow as many members to attend as is possible.

3.2 Meetings are well attended, and members are given time to raise concerns about anti-social behaviour associated with injecting drug use in the area. Meetings continue to be constructive and local resident reps consistently raise their concerns, including highlighting hotspots of outdoor injecting, drug dealing, discarded needles that can be responded to by the service outreach activity, Police Scotland, and NRS.

3.3 As the Forum membership has become established, some issues raised are not associated with the Thistle service but nevertheless cause significant concern to the community. Although these wider issues are beyond the official remit of the forum, the partner membership often allows a response to begin and members to feel heard.

3.4 The NRS Calton action plan continues to be implemented and updated at the TCEF. The placement of the public drug related litter bins in the Calton and Trongate areas continues to be monitored and feedback remains overwhelmingly positive. Thistle outreach activity to key sites and surrounding areas encourages movement from public sites to the use of The Thistle to reduce risk of displacement to new drug use sites.

3.5 The Oversight Board has committed to continuing to engage with the wider community and a bi-annual Thistle Community newsletter (Appendix 1) has been distributed to all local residential properties (17,900 copies), updating on service data, feedback from service users and helpful numbers for reporting concerns to the Police, the Council or Registered Social landlords. The content is developed with the members of the TCEF.

3.6 The most recent newsletter included an update from the ENACT evaluation team on the community impact of the service, as below. Early results on community impact were presented to the TCEF by the ENACT team, acknowledging the significance of the Forum.

Early findings on community impact from the formal evaluation of The Thistle:

The 'ENACT' study is evaluating the impact of The Thistle on the local community (including residents and businesses), as well as people who inject drugs and public services like the NHS. A range of health, social and economic outcomes will be considered to understand impacts fully, including potential benefits and harms and value for money. The research team is separate (independent) from those who are running The Thistle and the findings will be published no matter what they show.

In June 2026, the research team gave a talk at the Community Engagement meeting on initial findings from surveys of residents and the environment. These surveys were conducted during 2024 and 2025, allowing a comparison before and after The Thistle opened. Analysis suggests a small improvement since The Thistle opened in how Calton residents felt about their community, compared to people living in similar areas elsewhere in Glasgow. No big differences over time were seen in concerns regarding crime and drug use, or recent experience as a victim of crime. Provisional findings also showed injecting-related litter fell in the Calton area since The Thistle and other community initiatives (e.g. needle bins, deep cleaning of hotspots) were introduced, compared to other areas in Glasgow. The full findings from these surveys will be published following review by a scientific journal.

For further information on the ENACT study, see: www.gcu.ac.uk/enact.
The community impact studies are being submitted to peer reviewed journals. Wider dissemination of research findings will follow publication.

4. Service User Engagement

4.1 The Thistle Service User Forum is well established, supported by the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) Senior Officer with lived experience, and continues to influence service model and delivery.

4.2 Feedback demonstrates consistently high levels of satisfaction among attendees, with service users highlighting the respectful, non-judgemental approach of staff and the positive impact of The Thistle environment.

4.3 Whilst overall perceptions remain positive, several recurring barriers continue to limit uptake of the supervised injecting service, most notably:

- the absence of an inhalation space
- restrictions on shared substance use
- anxiety about potential police interaction

These themes have remained consistent from the infancy of the forum and appear to be the main factors influencing service engagement.

4.4 A number of service improvements have already been implemented in direct response to feedback, demonstrating the value of structured service user engagement and a commitment to continuous improvement. These include:

- Registration procedures were reviewed and streamlined to reduce delays while maintaining health & safety requirements.
- More comprehensive injecting packs including gauze, tissues and alcohol wipes on admission.
- Welfare Rights support has been introduced on-site in response to repeated requests for practical benefits advice.
- An independent advocacy service attends the service fortnightly and has provided support with Adult Support and Protection (ASP) cases.
- A GP service has been made available on-site, improving access to primary care and reducing barriers associated with mainstream registration and appointment systems. Service Users are currently involved in reviewing the GP service.
- A suggestions box has been implemented and is being actively utilised by service users.
- A noticeboard was installed to improve communication of the different services available on-site and demonstrate responsiveness.
- Art supplies were purchased on request from the service user forum and are used frequently.
- Service Users and staff created a Pebble garden for International Overdose Awareness Day 2025. This remains a permanent feature at Hunter Street and can be accessed by anyone who wishes to pay respects to their loved ones.

4.5 The Thistle has demonstrated responsiveness by implementing several service improvements based on service user feedback. However, significant structural barriers continue to limit wider engagement, particularly the absence of inhalation facilities, restrictions around shared substance use, and cultural concerns regarding policing. Addressing these issues, alongside improving

engagement with women and non-users, will form the key focus of future Service User Forum development activity.

4.6 Work remains ongoing to progress a business case for an Inhalation Service, to be presented to a future IJB.

5. Wider Engagement

5.1 Lead managers and clinicians continue to be invited to a range of events, academic meetings and conferences across Scotland and the UK to share the experience and learning from the implementation of the service.

5.2 Regular requests from students to learn more about the service are supported by the ADP in group sessions. These are generally well attended and give an opportunity to tackle the stigma associated with drug use and the misinformation often perpetuated on social media.

5.3 Tours of the service are arranged on request and local residents and businesses are given priority. These are facilitated by the Thistle management team before the service opens at 8am.

6. Media and Press Engagement

6.1 Since opening, careful consideration has been given to the level of detail provided to the media, in order to balance transparency with the need to protect the privacy and safety of service users.

6.2 Should any inaccuracies be reported in the media, the Council will address these matters via the Press Office and request corrections where appropriate. Information contained within official Council, NHSGGC and IJB/HSCP reports is frequently referenced and cited by the media; as this information is already part of the public record, media representatives are not required to seek permission from the press office to use these details or to request an official comment from the council.

6.3 The Press Office's Public Relations Officer remains involved with the Oversight Board and operational leads to support requests from the media and responses to enquiries.

6.4 Whilst the service is aware of Thistle discussions on social media, the comms and engagement plan has avoided participation in these, and social media activity is limited to single posts to promote awareness of new developments such as the community newsletter.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The IJB Public Engagement Committee is asked to:

a) Note the contents of the report; and
b) Agree that The Thistle lead officers continue to provide updates on engagement activity to the PEC as necessary and no less frequently than once per year.

The Thistle Newsletter

Glasgow's Safer Drug Consumption Facility

Open 9am - 9pm 365 days a year

Evaluation of The Thistle

Research is underway to understand the impact of The Thistle on the local community, including residents and businesses, as well as people who inject drugs and public services such as the NHS. The research is being led by Glasgow Caledonian University and University of Glasgow and brings together experts from several organisations.

The 'ENACT' study will look at a range of health, social and economic outcomes to fully understand the impacts the service is having, including potential benefits, harms, and whether it is good value for money.

The research team are independent and not involved in the running of The Thistle. All findings will be published no matter what they show and will be shared in a series of reports.

How will the evaluation be done?

The team will find out the impacts on the local community by carrying out:

- Surveys of residents to examine any change in people's views and experiences of their neighbourhood, including concerns about crime and drug use;
- Surveys of the environment, counting how drug-related litter (such as needles and syringes) in local streets varies over time;
- Focus groups and interviews with local people to explore their views and study how these vary over time;
- Analysis of routine data (such as house prices and police data) to examine effects on the local economy and crime.

What has the research team found so far?

In June 2026, the research team gave a talk at the Thistle Community Engagement Forum meeting on initial findings from surveys of residents and the environment.

These surveys were carried out during 2024 and 2025, allowing a comparison before and after The Thistle opened. Analysis suggests a small improvement since The Thistle opened in how Calton residents felt about their community, compared to people living in similar areas elsewhere in Glasgow. No big differences over time were seen in concerns regarding crime and drug use, or recent experience as a victim of crime.

Provisional findings also showed injecting-related litter fell in the Calton area since The Thistle and other community initiatives (e.g. needle bins, deep cleaning of hotspots) were introduced, compared to other areas in Glasgow. The full findings from these surveys will be published following review by a scientific journal.

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NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

Onward referrals from The Thistle

We're often asked about the next steps someone who uses The Thistle has available to them and how regularly service users are supported to begin or move to the next phase of their recovery journey.

Since the Thistle opened, staff have made 234 onward referrals to a variety of treatment services to improve the lives of service users. The most common treatment referral was to alcohol and drug treatment services (ADRS), BBV testing, sexual and reproductive health and the Crisis Outreach Service.

Access to a variety of treatment options, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and residential rehabilitation, is provided via Glasgow Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services (GADRS). GADRS works with individuals wherever they are at and supports them to develop a care plan to begin their recovery journey. The Thistle has also made over 1000 referrals to services that support people with other immediate concerns, including GP services and housing and homelessness support.

The Thistle gives people the necessary time and space to meet their most urgent concerns, understand the range of treatment options available and decide how they want to progress.

Feedback from Thistle Service User

We're always gathering feedback through our Service User Forum to ensure we are providing the best support possible.

"I've been using the The Thistle for roughly one year. Coming here changed my life. I was skippering - all I did was use drugs. I'm now back in my house and have been supported to reduce my drug use. Not just that, I feel valued by staff. It's different to other services. The Lived Experience workers really help by giving me guidance. I feel doors are opening - my life is taking a new direction where I've a future."

Service User, June 2026

A Day in the Life

To read the full blog, and hear from staff across the Alcohol and Drug Partnership in Glasgow City, use the QR code to visit our website.

Useful Contacts

To report discarded needles, contact 0141 287 9700, or use the My Glasgow App.

0141 553 2832/2833

ggc.thistle@nhs.scot

To find out more about The Thistle, or arrange a tour of the service, please visit: www.glasgowcity.hscp.scot/sdcf

To anonymously report a crime in Glasgow, contact **Crime Stoppers** on 0800 561 6666.

Contact **Simon Community's Street Team** for support for someone sleeping rough on **0800 027 7466**

Contact your local housing provider for support with any issues relating to your tenancy and/or property on:
Wheatley Homes Glasgow: 0800 479 7979
Lowther: 0800 561 6666
Thenue Housing: 0141 550 3581
Molendinar Park HA: 0141 564 5256
Home Group: 0345 1414 663