

Simon Power, Georgina te Heuheu

19 October, 2011

Drug Court pilot announced for Auckland

The Government has agreed to establish a Drug Court pilot in Auckland to deal with offenders with severe alcohol and drug dependencies, Justice Minister Simon Power and Courts Minister Georgina te Heuheu announced today.

The Law Commission's review of the Misuse of Drugs Act recommended the Government consider establishing a Drug Court pilot subject to a full analysis of the likely cost-effectiveness and availability of funding.

The pilot, which will run for five years, will use a pre-sentence model by way of adjournment and deferral of sentencing. It will deal with approximately 100 offenders a year at treatment-related costs of \$2 million.

Mr Power said the court is expected to be up and running from the second half of next year. It has not been decided where in Auckland it will sit.

"Establishing a Drug Court delivers on priorities under the Government's Drivers of Crime work programme, which includes reducing alcohol-related harm and improving the availability and accessibility of alcohol and drug treatment services.

"The Drug Court will deal with offenders with severe addiction problems who require intensive treatment to help break the cycle of their substance abuse.

"It will be an option for offenders, including recidivist drink-drivers, who plead guilty to an offence where alcohol or drugs have been a contributing factor, and where there is a serious penalty, such as a term of imprisonment of up to 3 years."

The Minister for Courts, Georgina te Heuheu, said offenders will be required to attend a treatment programme, be subject to random drug testing, and be required to regularly attend the court.

"Once offenders have successfully graduated from their treatment programme, their success could be taken into account at sentencing.

"Although Drug Courts are a resource-intensive option, international research shows they can reduce recidivism by an average of 8 per cent."

Officials will report to Ministers in February on progress on designing and implementing the court.

The cost primarily will be funded from a \$10 million investment package announced today, which is aimed at reducing harm from alcohol and drug abuse.

There will be a full evaluation of the court's effectiveness, costs, and benefits after four years, and a decision about whether it will continue and if it will be introduced elsewhere will be made after the evaluation.