## THE LOOP - PRESS RELEASE

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# The Loop opens Birmingham's first drug checking services

On 14th November, The Loop Drug Checking Service will be launching drug checking in Birmingham, with services operating fortnightly in two city centre locations, free to the public and fully funded by Birmingham City Council.

The Birmingham service comes as The Loop marks **ten years** since introducing drug checking in the UK, continuing the expansion of its harm reduction services across UK cities.

Drug checking services will be provided by The Loop at BIRCH (Birmingham Integrated Recovery Community Hub) in Digbeth and CGL Birmingham's Health & Wellbeing Hub at Lonsdale House in the city centre.

Drug checking combines rapid chemical analysis of substances of concern with individually tailored, non-judgemental health consultations to reduce drug-related harm, without fear of arrest.

People accessing the service will be able to surrender a small amount of a substance for analysis by The Loop's chemists with results informing personalised consultations with health staff. This contributes to a wider understanding of local drug markets and drug trends in Birmingham, with information from testing informing public health initiatives and targeted harm reduction responses.

The launch forms part of The Loop's continued expansion of drug checking across the UK. In 2016, The Loop introduced the UK's first event-based drug checking services. It went on to introduce the UK's first community-based drug checking services in 2018, before opening the UK's first Home Office-licensed regular city centre service in Bristol in 2024 and three London services in 2026.

The Birmingham service comes during the tenth anniversary year for drug checking in the UK, marking a further step in The Loop's work in widening access to regular community-based drug checking, at a time when drug-related deaths continue to rise and drug markets become more turbulent.

The development and delivery of the Birmingham services involves local partners including KIKIT Pathways to Recovery, Change Grow Live (CGL), University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust , and West Midlands Police Force.

**Katy Porter**, CEO of The Loop, said:

*"As we mark ten years since introducing drug checking in the UK, we're pleased to be continuing the expansion of regular accessible services with two new sites in Birmingham. Drug checking gives people access to accurate information within a harm reduction consultation informed by The Loop's testing. This supports understanding of potential risks and enables people to take informed decisions related to their drug use.*

*Alongside the individualised support, it contributes to our understanding of local drug markets, helps inform wider harm reduction responses delivered by all our partners, and responds to the continued concern in the level of harm and drug-related deaths across the UK".*

**Councillor Nosheen Khalid**, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care at Birmingham City Council, said:

*"This service is an important opportunity to help protect people's health and reduce drug-related harm in Birmingham. By providing access to trusted information and support, we can help people make safer decisions and connect them with wider health services where needed.*

*"We're pleased to be working with local partners and The Loop on this initiative. Taking a practical, evidence-based approach will help us better understand risks, support vulnerable residents and contribute to safer communities across the city".*

**Simon Foster,** West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and Chair of the West Midlands Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership said:

*'The launch of The Loop's community-based drug checking services in Birmingham is a vital, evidence-based step forward. By combining rapid analysis with expert health consultations, this initiative will provide crucial information to help people make safer decisions, while delivering the rapid intelligence needed to counter increasingly dangerous and turbulent drug markets.*

*This partnership is a testament to our collective determination to prevent harm, reduce the burden on our emergency services, and build safer, healthier communities across the West Midlands."*

**Professor Fiona Measham**, Founder and Chair of Trustees of The Loop, said:

*"Drug markets are more dangerous than ever, with increasing numbers of potent synthetic drugs in circulation across the UK. Drug checking can play a unique role in countering these threats, acting as the 'canary in the coalmine'. It can test, identify and communicate these risks rapidly and directly to local services and local communities* ***before*** *consumption,*

*benefiting everyone. Drug checking can reduce drug-related harm and hospitalisations, which reduces the burden on emergency services and the NHS."*

The Loop is clear that no drug use is without risk, and better understanding of substances of concern in circulation can support individuals, communities and services in reducing drug-related harm.

**ENDS**

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# Notes to Editors

## About The Loop

The Loop is the UK's first dedicated drug checking charity, with years of experience delivering drug checking, drug testing and related harm reduction services.

Founded by Professor Fiona Measham, The Loop provides a range of evidence-informed and evidence-making services to a variety of stakeholders.

The Loop provides non-judgemental, factual information to communicate relative risk and help reduce potential harm, alongside signposting and support to health and other services where appropriate.

The Loop was established in 2012 and became The Loop Drug Checking Service charity in 2022. Its registered charity number is 1200533.

For more information: www.wearetheloop.org

**What are drug checking and drug testing services?**

Drug checking services have operated across Europe for decades and were introduced in the UK by The Loop in 2016. The Loop has delivered regular publicly accessible drug checking services since January 2024.

The Birmingham service forms part of The Loop's expanding network of regular community-based drug checking services, operating on scheduled dates each month. It will operate across two sites in Birmingham providing fortnightly access to drug checking.

### Birmingham service information

**Digbeth site**

BIRCH - Birmingham Integrated Recovery Community Hub
9 Allcock Street, Deritend
Birmingham, B9 4DY

BIRCH is owned and managed by KIKIT Pathways to Recovery. They host Change Grow Live, DATUS and St Basil's in the building.

The drug checking service will operate on the **second Saturday of each month** from 12pm to 8pm (last surrender: 7pm) and commencing on 14 November.

**Central site**

CGL Birmingham - Health & Wellbeing Hub
Lonsdale House, Blucher Street
Birmingham, B1 1QU

The drug checking service will operate on the **last Wednesday of the month** from 2pm to 9pm (last surrender: 8pm) and commencing on 25 November.

**How does the service work?**

The services will operate on a drop-in basis and will not require an appointment.

Service users can surrender a small amount of a substance of concern for laboratory analysis. The Loop can complete testing using a very small amount.

The Loop's chemists analyse surrendered substances using a range of analytical techniques to identify their contents and, where possible, strength.

Service users then receive an individually tailored, anonymous and non-judgemental consultation with a health professional informed by the results of the analysis.

No surrendered substances are returned.

**Birmingham partners – funder and hosts**

Birmingham City Council: Public health | Birmingham City Council

The council has a responsibility to protect and improve the health of citizens, working in partnership with the NHS, police, third sector and private sector, and to support every citizen to thrive in Birmingham.

KIKIT Pathways to Recovery: KIKIT Pathways To Recovery - Drug And Alcohol Support

KIKIT is a social enterprise with over 25 years' experience of working with diverse communities, passionate about improving the lives of those who need support.

Change Grow Live: Drug & Alcohol Service - Birmingham | Change Grow Live

Change Grow Live is a health and social care charity providing free and confidential treatment, support and information about drug and alcohol use, smoking, homelessness, justice and probation, and employment.

**Media enquiries**

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Press images, further service information and spokespeople from The Loop are available on request.

**Further information**

Research and evaluation: www.wearetheloop.org/publications

Drug alerts: www.wearetheloop.org/drug-alerts

Drug checking information: www.wearetheloop.org/drug-checking