# Sadiq Khan’s bid to decriminalise cannabis sparks fierce right-wing backlash



The recent announcement by London Mayor Sadiq Khan, advocating for the decriminalisation of small quantities of natural cannabis, has ignited a fierce backlash from right-wing critics who frame the proposal as reckless. Critics, including voices from major newspapers such as The Sun and the Daily Mail, have expressed alarm, often citing fears related to crime and public health. However, the London Drugs Commission (LDC) report that spurred Khan's support claims instead to highlight an evidence-based approach aimed at reducing harm and promoting equity, while bolstering education and addiction services.

Sadiq Khan's advocacy comes in response to a comprehensive report released in May 2025 by the LDC, which Khan established to examine the current drug laws. Chaired by Lord Charlie Falconer, a former justice secretary under Tony Blair, the LDC's findings underscore the disparities inherent in current cannabis laws, particularly their disproportionate impact on ethnic minority communities. The commission argues that existing legal frameworks fail to address the root causes of drug-related issues and harm, with policing strategies often exacerbating community tensions.

The LDC’s recommendations suggest not a move towards full legalisation, but rather the reclassification of cannabis under the Psychoactive Substances Act, allowing personal possession while criminalising its production and distribution. This nuanced stance underscores the commission's aim to shift focus from punitive measures against users to essential support systems, including education on cannabis use and increased addiction services. Falconer remarked, “Legalisation is not the answer. The criminal justice system response needs to focus only on the dealers and not the users.”

While this initiative seems rooted in sound research—Khan has drawn on international examples from countries such as Portugal, which has seen success with decriminalisation since 2001—it remains a contentious topic. Right-wing commentators have been quick to dismiss the proposal as indicative of irresponsible governance. For instance, Conservative London Assembly member Susan Hall labelled the proposal as “utterly ridiculous” and urged for more financial resources to be allocated to policing rather than exploring such reforms. Likewise, Chris Philp, the shadow home secretary, voiced concerns over potential negative impacts on public safety, predicting that London could face repercussions similar to those observed in some North American cities following similar policy shifts.

Despite the heated pushback, proponents of the decriminalisation model underscore its potential benefits. Research from organisations like the Transform Drug Policy Foundation suggests that legalising cannabis could not only generate significant fiscal returns—estimated at £1.5 billion annually for the UK Treasury—but also could curtail the illegal drug market. Advocates argue that right-wing opposition often fails to acknowledge the possibility of a balanced approach that reduces harm without succumbing to full legalisation.

As the debate unfolds, it reveals deeper questions about public policy and societal attitudes towards drugs. While Sadiq Khan pushes for a forward-thinking strategy that aims for a comprehensive overhaul of outdated drug laws, the critiques from his political opponents reflect a broader struggle over governance in London—a city characterised by its diversity yet stymied by entrenched inequalities.

In the coming months, how Khan's proposal evolves in the political arena, amidst public scrutiny and parliamentary debate, will be pivotal for the future of drug policy in London and possibly, the UK at large. The ongoing dialogue not only involves legal implications but also touches on community relations, public health, and the capacity of the state to implement progressive reforms in the face of entrenched conservative views.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://leftfootforward.org/2025/05/right-wing-in-meltdown-over-sadiq-khans-support-of-cannabis-reform/), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sadiq-khan-drug-commission-cannabis-legalisation-b961084.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://leftfootforward.org/2025/05/right-wing-in-meltdown-over-sadiq-khans-support-of-cannabis-reform/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/may/12/sadiq-khan-launches-commission-to-examine-cannabis-legality), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/sadiq-khan-drugs-tsar-legalising-cannabis-london-b999510.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/05/mayor-of-london-to-examine-benefits-of-decriminalising-cannabis), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/04/sadiq-khan-plans-pilot-to-decriminalise-minor-cannabis-offences)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sadiq-khan-drug-commission-cannabis-legalisation-b961084.html), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/09/23/sadiq-khan-will-not-allowed-turn-london-drug-supermarket/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://leftfootforward.org/2025/05/right-wing-in-meltdown-over-sadiq-khans-support-of-cannabis-reform/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/sadiq-khan-drugs-tsar-legalising-cannabis-london-b999510.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://leftfootforward.org/2025/05/right-wing-in-meltdown-over-sadiq-khans-support-of-cannabis-reform/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/05/mayor-of-london-to-examine-benefits-of-decriminalising-cannabis)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://leftfootforward.org/2025/05/right-wing-in-meltdown-over-sadiq-khans-support-of-cannabis-reform/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/05/mayor-of-london-to-examine-benefits-of-decriminalising-cannabis> - In April 2021, Sadiq Khan announced plans to establish an independent London Drugs Commission to explore the potential health, economic, and criminal justice benefits of decriminalising cannabis. This initiative aimed to address the damage caused by the illegal drug trade and was part of Khan's re-election manifesto. The commission would consider evidence from various countries, including Portugal, where drug decriminalisation has been implemented since 2001. Khan emphasised the need for fresh ideas to reduce the harms associated with drug-related crime in London.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/may/12/sadiq-khan-launches-commission-to-examine-cannabis-legality> - In May 2022, Sadiq Khan launched the London Drugs Commission, chaired by Lord Charlie Falconer, to examine the effectiveness of the UK's drug laws, focusing on cannabis. The commission aimed to consider evidence from around the world on the outcomes of various drug policies, including those in Portugal, Canada, and several US states where cannabis has been legalised. This initiative was part of Khan's commitment to an evidence-based approach to potential decriminalisation.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/04/sadiq-khan-plans-pilot-to-decriminalise-minor-cannabis-offences> - In January 2022, Sadiq Khan proposed a pilot scheme in three London boroughs to divert young people found with small amounts of cannabis away from the criminal justice system. Instead of arrest, individuals would be offered classes or counselling. This approach was inspired by a successful model from Thames Valley police. The pilot aimed to reduce reoffending and was part of Khan's broader strategy to address drug-related crime in London.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sadiq-khan-drug-commission-cannabis-legalisation-b961084.html> - In May 2025, Sadiq Khan's drug commission released a report recommending the reclassification of natural cannabis under the Psychoactive Substances Act, allowing personal possession while keeping production and distribution illegal. The commission also called for better education on the risks of cannabis use and addiction support. This approach aimed to reduce harm and promote equity without advocating full legalisation. The report received mixed reactions, with some experts urging Khan to deliver on his election pledge to establish the commission.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/sadiq-khan-drugs-tsar-legalising-cannabis-london-b999510.html> - In May 2022, Sadiq Khan appointed Lord Falconer to lead a review of the law on cannabis. This decision followed Khan's visit to a cannabis facility in Los Angeles, where he observed the impact of legalisation. The commission aimed to examine the effectiveness of UK drug laws on cannabis and the potential for reducing drug-related harm. This initiative was part of Khan's commitment to an evidence-based approach to potential decriminalisation.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/09/23/sadiq-khan-will-not-allowed-turn-london-drug-supermarket/> - In September 2022, Steve Reed, Labour's shadow justice secretary, stated that Sadiq Khan would not be allowed to turn London into a 'drug supermarket'. Reed emphasised that Labour would not support relaxing drug laws and would not grant mayors further control over drug policing. This response was in reaction to Khan's efforts to explore cannabis decriminalisation and legalisation, highlighting the political challenges associated with such reforms.