# Belfast’s Lord Mayor praises Portuguese drug policy and advocates for safe injection sites



Belfast’s Lord Mayor, Micky Murray, has highlighted the Portuguese approach to drug policy as “probably one of the most successful models” globally for addressing the impact of harmful narcotics, including heroin. Speaking to Dublin’s Hot Press magazine, Mr Murray, who represents south Belfast for the Alliance Party, emphasised the potential relevance of this model for cities such as Belfast in confronting their drug crises.

The Portuguese framework, introduced around 2000, involves decriminalising the purchase, possession, and use of small amounts of all drugs. It is coupled with comprehensive harm reduction strategies, including a network of specialised centres and professional mental health and general health support services. Mr Murray noted, “No model is going to work everywhere... So, I think you look at something like the Portuguese model and think how would that work for a city like Belfast?”

This reflection comes amid concerning figures in Belfast where nearly 1,000 individuals have died from drug-related incidents since 2018. Two years ago, Belfast City Council voted in favour of establishing a safe injection facility, also referred to as a harm prevention centre, intended to provide a controlled environment for drug use under professional supervision. However, progress toward opening such a centre has been slow. The council is reportedly exploring options to secure some form of “special dispensation” to allow the project to proceed, given legislative changes are required to enable operations similar to those in Glasgow and Dublin.

Mr Murray pointed out the prolonged debate on this issue, stating, “We need to look at things like safer injection spaces or overdose prevention facilities... that have been working successfully all over the world since the 70s, 80s, 90s. And it’s 2025, and we’re still having the conversation about, can we open one in Belfast?”

The Lord Mayor also voiced support for the legalisation of marijuana, advocating for at least medicinal use. He disclosed having smoked marijuana twice himself, describing his reaction as not the “coolest response”.

On matters of social inclusion, Mr Murray addressed issues surrounding LGBTQ+ rights and political discourse. As Belfast’s first openly gay Lord Mayor, he criticised some political figures for their insensitive comments about LGBTQ+ individuals. He remarked, “A lot of right wing politicians talk about trans people as if they are some creature rather than an everyday person or as if they are some kind of anomaly. That’s very personal.”

Reflecting on ongoing political developments, Mr Murray discussed the prospect of a referendum on Irish unity. He stressed the importance of inclusivity in such a decision, stating, “When you’re looking at changing the whole future of a country, you need that to be as inclusive as possible and to represent as many people as possible and for no one to feel as if they’re being discriminated.”

Regarding international politics, he commented on former US President Donald Trump’s administration, particularly its stance on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). While questioning President Trump’s personal convictions, Mr Murray noted the paradox of the administration’s appointment of openly LGBTQ+ individuals to high-ranking positions. For example, he cited Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, an openly gay man married to his husband for over 13 years with two children, as evidence of this complexity.

Additionally, Mr Murray disclosed that he has never listened to band Kneecap and mentioned that some of the online abuse he receives occasionally borders on death threats, although he has not encountered such threats through formal channels.

The Irish News (Belfast) is reporting on these developments and comments, highlighting ongoing discussions in Belfast concerning drug policy reform, social inclusion, and political representation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://drugpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/dpa-drug-decriminalization-portugal-health-human-centered-approach_0.pdf> - Corroborates Portugal's health-focused decriminalization model, showing reduced overdose deaths and HIV rates since 2001, aligning with Belfast's interest in replicating similar outcomes.
* <https://womenanddrugs.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/DONE-12-Portuguese-decriminalisation_ENGFINAL.pdf> - Details Portugal's administrative process for drug possession cases and investment in harm reduction services, supporting the structural framework mentioned by Lord Mayor Murray.
* <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/drug-decriminalization-in-portugal-challenges-and-limitations> - Describes Portugal's referral system to administrative panels for small-scale drug possession, relevant to Belfast's consideration of decriminalization models.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_policy_of_Portugal> - Provides an overview of Portugal's 2001 decriminalization law and Dissuasion Commissions, mirroring the framework highlighted in the article.
* <https://transformdrugs.org/blog/drug-decriminalisation-in-portugal-setting-the-record-straight> - Clarifies Portugal's 2001 decriminalization policy and its health-led approach, reinforcing Murray's endorsement of this model.