

Criminal Justice Project: Drug Interventions Programme



St Helens Drug Testing Profile (2014 to 2017)

April 2018

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KEY FINDINGS

ST HELENS CUSTODY SUITE

- Between January 2014 and December 2017, 16% of the attempted drug tests across Merseyside were carried out at St Helens custody suite (n=3,654; note that St Helens custody suite has been closed since mid-August 2017).
- Attempted drug tests more than halved between 2015 and 2016 (53% decrease), with an overall reduction of 79% over the four-year period.
- The average positive drug test rate in 2016 was 72%, compared to 48% in 2014.
- There were 223 positive drug tests in 2017 (219 individuals).
- Over half (53%) of positive tests in 2017 were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 104 [47%]; opiates only = 15 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=104; 47%).
- Two in five (40%) positive drug test records in 2017 reported theft (n=90), followed by 27% Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (n=60).
- Around nine in ten (88%) were male (n=197).
- Just under one in five (19%) were aged 18-24 years (n=42), followed by those aged 30-34 years (n=40; 18%) and 35-39 years (n=41; 18%).
- The majority were White European (n=220; 99%).
- Around three in five (59%) were resident in St Helens (n=107), while 19% were resident in Liverpool (n=34) and 12% were resident in Knowsley (n=21).

ST HELENS RESIDENTS

- Between January 2014 and December 2017, 9% of the attempted drug tests carried out across Merseyside were St Helens residents (n=1,978).
- The largest proportion of St Helens residents were tested in St Helens (n=1,608; 81%), followed by Sefton (n=225; 11%).
- Attempted drug tests reduced by 48% between 2014 and 2015, and then halved (50% decrease) between 2015 and 2016, though they increased by 6% between 2016 and 2017.
- There were 200 positive drug tests in 2017.
- Around three in five (59%) positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 101 [51%]; opiates only = 18 [9%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=81; 41%).
- Over two in five (43%) positive drug test records in 2017 reported theft (n=86), followed by 28% MDA offences (n=55).
- Over four in five (83%) were male (n=166).
- Just under one-quarter (23%) were aged 18-24 years (n=46), followed by those aged 25-29 years (n=35; 18%).
- The majority were White European (n=197; 99%).

INTRODUCTION

The Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) process generally begins with the police drug testing individuals in the custody suite following an arrest. If offenders test positive for Class A drugs (opiates and/or cocaine), they are served with a Required Assessment (RA) by the police. This is a compulsory legal sanction which requires the individual to attend up to two appointments (initial/follow-up RA) with a drugs worker. During these assessments the drugs worker will assess the individual's drug use and offending behaviour and, if necessary, encourage them to engage with drug treatment services (Home Office, 2010). In 2016/17, 57% of those accessing DIP in Merseyside presented via the RA route, while in St Helens 80% presented through RAs (Collins et al., 2017a). For this reason, the police play an important role in the early stages of the DIP process.

Merseyside Police introduced targeted drug testing in 2015. This involves a set list of questions around drug use that should be considered by the police before a decision is made on whether the arrestee is drug tested. The main aim of targeted testing is to reduce the number of negative drug tests carried out in the custody suite setting, thus save police time and money, while ensuring offenders who use drugs continue to be drug tested and referred to treatment services through the RA process.

This Drug Testing Profile for St Helens presents information on drug tests carried out at St Helens custody suite and on St Helens residents across the Merseyside area between January 2014 and December 2017, with a particular focus given to the most recent year (2017). This profile contextualises Merseyside Police drug testing data by providing numbers and trends of offenders who use drugs identified through this route into the DIP system and a demographic overview of the individuals. Comparisons to overall Merseyside figures have been made, where possible, with tables in Appendix A and B showing comparisons across each area (custody suite area and area of residence). This profile also provides recommendations for all stakeholders involved with DIP, in terms of the efficient use of resources and effective services locally and across Merseyside.

ST HELENS CUSTODY SUITE

OVERVIEW

Between January 2014 and December 2017, there were a total of 22,808 attempted drug tests in Merseyside's custody suites. The number of drug tests decreased year on year (Table 1), particularly between 2014 and 2015 (44% decrease) and between 2015 and 2016 (50% decrease), which is likely attributed to the implementation of targeted testing across Merseyside in 2015. Notably, the number of attempted drug tests across Merseyside reduced overall by around three-quarters (74%) within the four-year period.

St Helens custody suite has been closed since mid-August 2017, and its permanent closure has been proposed by the Head of Criminal Justice, Merseyside Police. When St Helens residents test positive for Class A drugs in the custody suites across Merseyside, they should be transferred to St Helens Integrated Recovery Service as part of the RA and continuity of care process which underpins DIP.

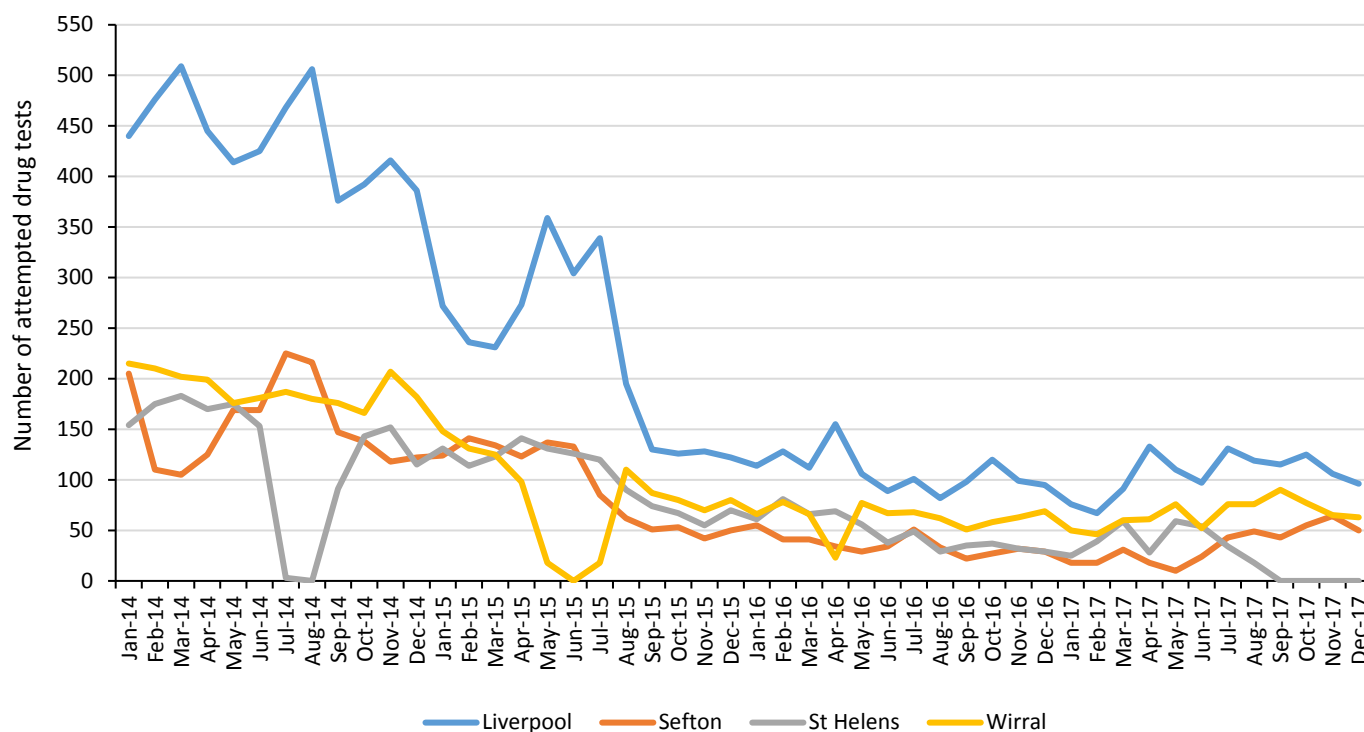
Of the drug tests across Merseyside between 2014 and 2017, 16% were carried out at St Helens custody suite (n=3,654; Table 1). The number of attempted drug tests at St Helens custody suite reduced year on year, representing a total decrease of 79% between 2014 and 2017; however it should be reminded that the suite has been closed since mid-August 2017. Notably, the number of tests more than halved in 2016 when compared to the previous year (53% decrease).

Table 1: Number of attempted drug tests by custody suite area and year (2014-17)

Area	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Liverpool	5,253	2,715	1,299	1,266	10,533
Sefton	1,849	1,135	428	423	3,835
St Helens	1,514	1,242	582	316	3,654
Wirral	2,281	965	748	792	4,786
Total	10,897	6,057	3,057	2,797	22,808

Figure 1 compares the number of attempted drug tests in St Helens with Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral (there are no custody suites in Knowsley). Evident is the reduction in the number of tests in all areas in 2015 when targeted testing was implemented. Excluding months when St Helens custody suite was closed¹, the lowest numbers of tests were recorded in January 2017 (n=25), April 2017 (n=28), August 2016 (n=29) and December 2016 (n=29), while tests were highest in March 2014 (n=183).

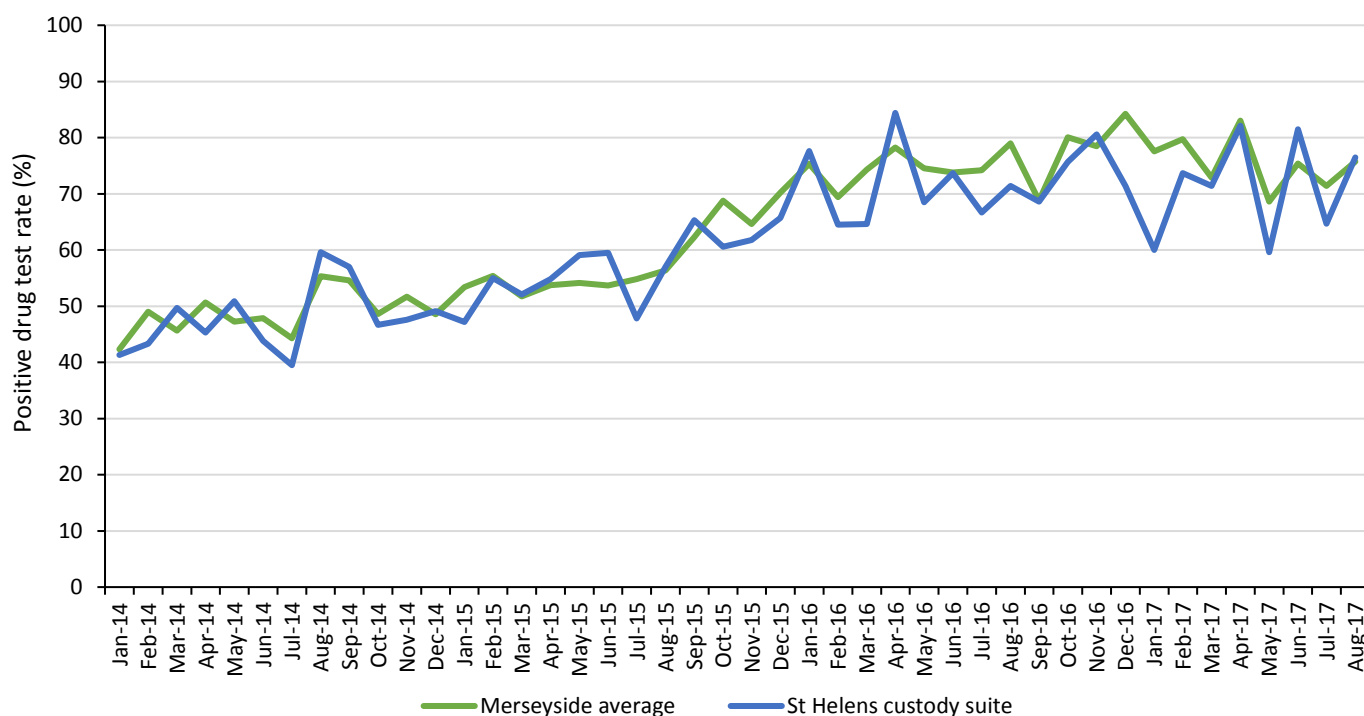
Figure 1: Number of attempted drug tests by custody suite area and month/year (2014-17)



¹ St Helens custody suite was closed July 2014 and August 2014, and mid-August 2017 onwards.

The positive drug test rate² for those drug tested in St Helens increased year on year between 2014 and 2016, though it was similar in 2016 and 2017 (Figure 2). The average positive drug test rate in 2016 was 72%, compared to 48% in 2014.

Figure 2: Positive drug test rate by month/year, St Helens custody suite and Merseyside (2014-17)



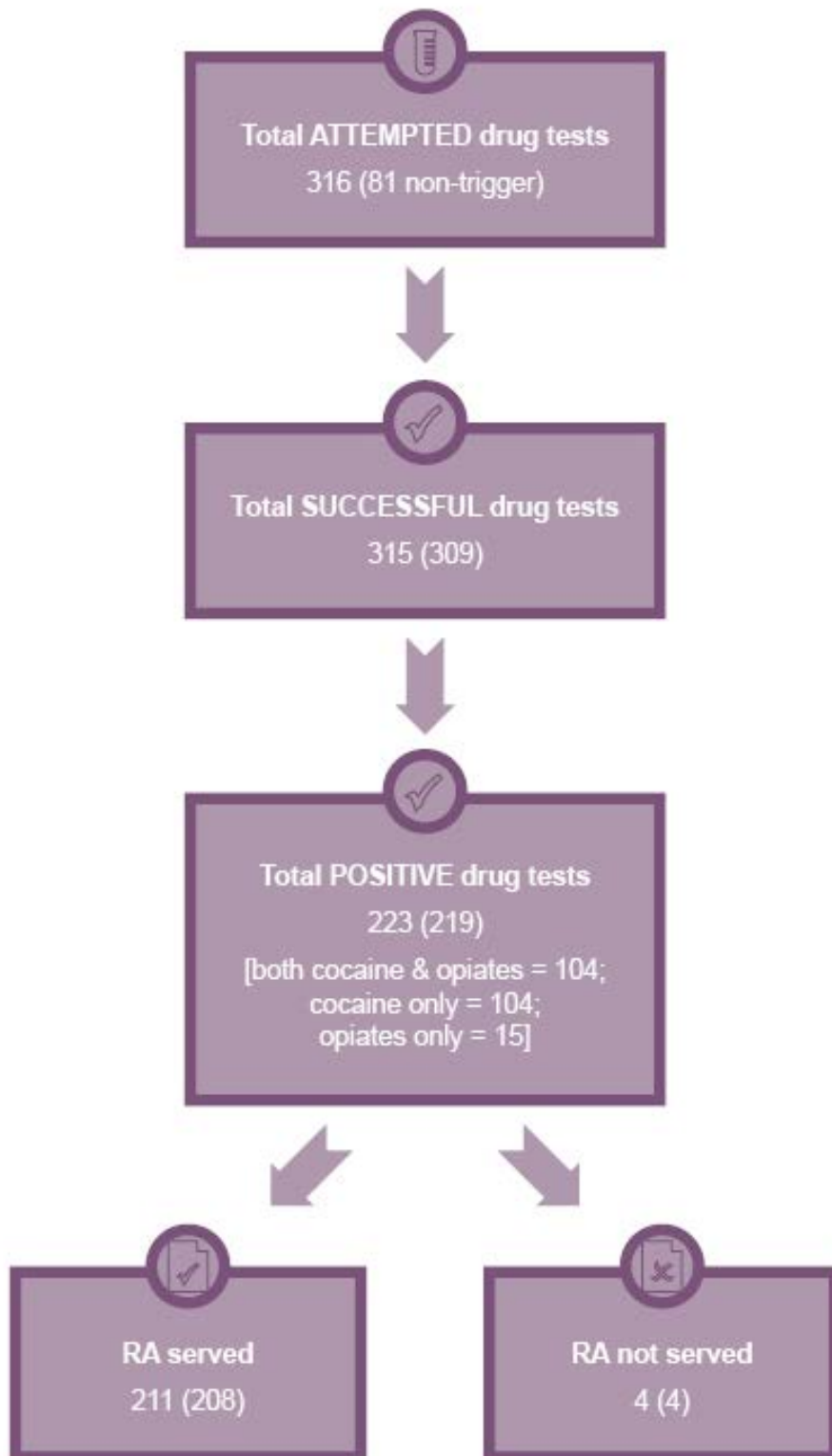
DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 3 shows the drug testing activity for those arrested and drug tested in St Helens between January and mid-August 2017. There were a total of 316 attempted drug tests in 2017; of which 315 were successful (309 individuals). Of the individuals successfully tested, 219 individuals tested positive. This represents a positive drug test rate of 71% in 2017, which is below the average positive drug test rate for Merseyside (74%).

Over half (53%) of the 223 positive tests in 2017 were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 104 [47%]; opiates only = 15 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=104; 47%). Similarly, 53% of drug tests across Merseyside were for opiate metabolites.

² Positive drug test rate = (number of individuals testing positive ÷ number of individuals successfully tested) x 100.

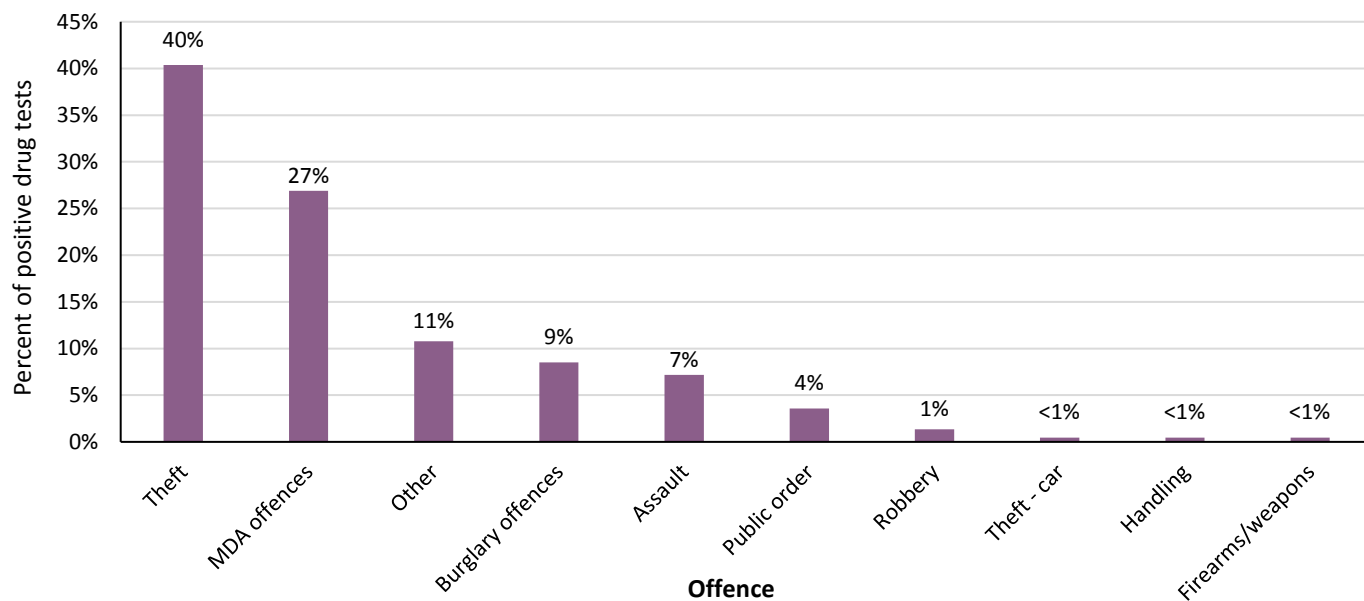
Figure 3: Drug testing activity in St Helens custody suite (2017)³



³ Numbers of individuals at each level are presented in brackets. 'Total attempted drug tests' is a summation of successful tests and those that were refused or aborted. 'RA served' and 'RA not served' indicate the number of occasions when those testing positive were either served or not served with the requirement to attend an initial RA. Records where tests were disputed and overturned have been removed; therefore the figure may be different to the subtraction of 'RA not served' from 'Total positive tests'.

Police drug testing data capture the offence that led to the arrest and subsequent drug test. Two in five (40%) positive drug test records in 2017 reported theft (n=90), followed by 27% Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (n=60; Figure 4). In comparison, data for all positive drug tests across Merseyside in 2017 reported a slightly lower proportion of theft (38%) and a higher proportion of MDA offences (31%).

Figure 4: Positive drug tests at St Helens custody suite by offence (2017)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Males accounted for just under nine in ten (88%) positive drug tests in St Helens in 2017 (n=197). This is a slightly higher proportion than the overall Merseyside figure (83%).

Figure 5 shows arrestees aged 18-24 years accounted for the largest proportion of those testing positive in 2017 at St Helens custody suite (n=42; 19%), followed by those aged 30-34 years (n=40; 18%) and 35-39 years (n=41; 18%). Proportions for these age groups are higher than those recorded across Merseyside.

Figure 5: Positive drug tests at St Helens custody suite by age group (2017)

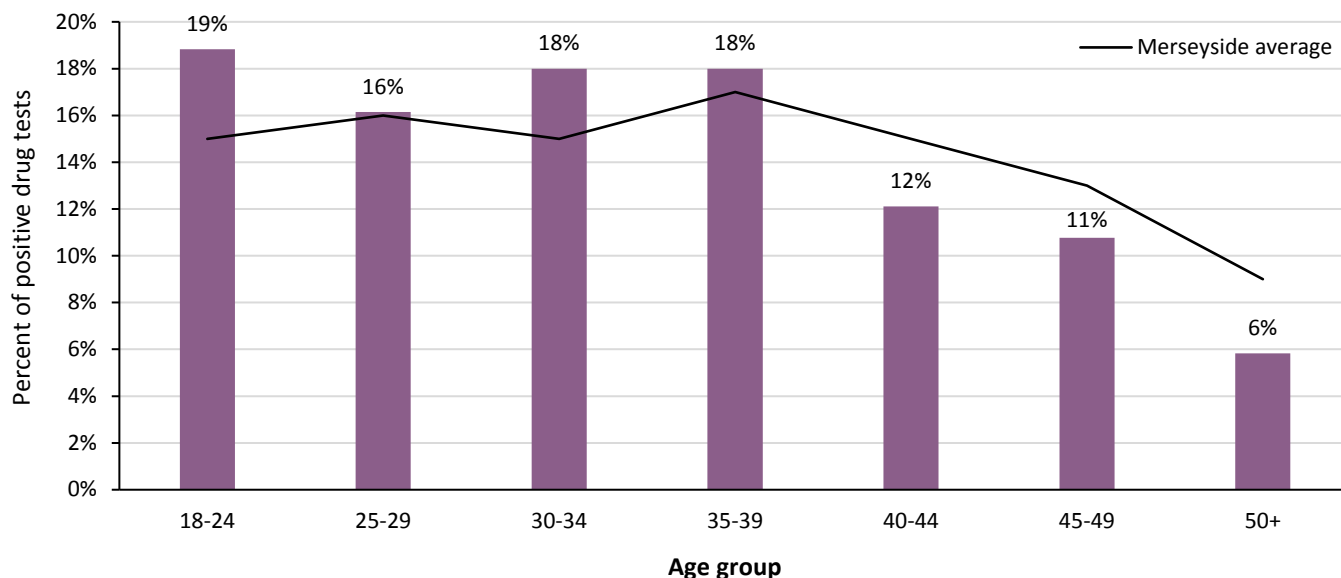


Table 2 shows some differences in age group proportions across gender in St Helens. Although there were smaller numbers of females, there were larger proportions aged 35-39 years and 40-44 years (42% and 15% respectively) when compared to males (16% and 11% respectively).

Table 2: Positive drug tests at St Helens custody suite by age group and gender (2017)⁴

Age group	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
18-24	***	8%	<45	20%	42	19%
25-29	***	8%	<35	17%	36	16%
30-34	***	12%	<40	19%	40	18%
35-39	11	42%	31	16%	42	19%
40-44	***	15%	<25	11%	26	12%
45-49	***	8%	<25	11%	24	11%
50+	***	8%	<15	6%	13	6%
Total	26	100%	197	100%	223	100%

The majority of those arrested who tested positive in St Helens custody suite in 2017 were White European (n=220; 99%), compared to 96% across Merseyside. Around three in five (59%) were resident in St Helens (n=107), while 19% were resident in Liverpool (n=34) and 12% were resident in Knowsley (n=21)⁵.

ST HELENS RESIDENTS

OVERVIEW

Of the 22,808 attempted drug tests across Merseyside between January 2014 and December 2017, 9% were carried out on St Helens residents (n=1,978). It should be noted that 18% of records across the four-year period did not have a Drug (and Alcohol) Action Team (D[A]AT) of residence recorded and therefore figures do not represent a true reflection of St Helens residents arrested and drug tested across Merseyside.

The largest proportion of St Helens residents were tested in St Helens (n=1,608; 81%), followed by Sefton (n=225; 11%; Table 3). Overall, the number of St Helens residents drug tested across Merseyside reduced by 74% between 2014 and 2016. However, they increased by 6% between 2016 and 2017, which is likely attributed to an increase in the recording of D(A)AT of residence in 2017⁶. The largest reduction in attempted drug tests was between 2015 and 2016 (50% decrease), followed by a 48% reduction between 2014 and 2015.

⁴ Throughout this report numbers less than five have been suppressed (with ***) to maintain confidentiality.

⁵ Drug (and Alcohol) Action Team (D[A]AT) of residence was missing for 43 records of the positive drug tests carried out in St Helens.

⁶ Records missing D(A)AT of residence: 2014=17%; 2015=21%; 2016=25%; 2017=11%.

Table 3: Number of attempted drug tests for St Helens residents by custody suite area and year (2014-17)

Area	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Liverpool	<85	<20	<20	<25	136
Sefton	106	11	13	95	225
St Helens	770	468	223	147	1,608
Wirral	***	***	***	***	9
Total	960	500	252	266	1,978

Figure 6 shows the number of attempted drug tests across Merseyside for St Helens residents by month and year, clearly demonstrating the reduction in the number of tests between 2014 and 2016. The lowest number of attempted tests for St Helens’ residents was in November 2016 (n<5⁷), followed by December 2016, January 2017 and April 2017 (n=11 each). Tests were highest in April 2014 (n=94) and May 2014 (n=98).

Figure 6: Number of attempted drug tests for St Helens residents by month/year (2014-17)



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

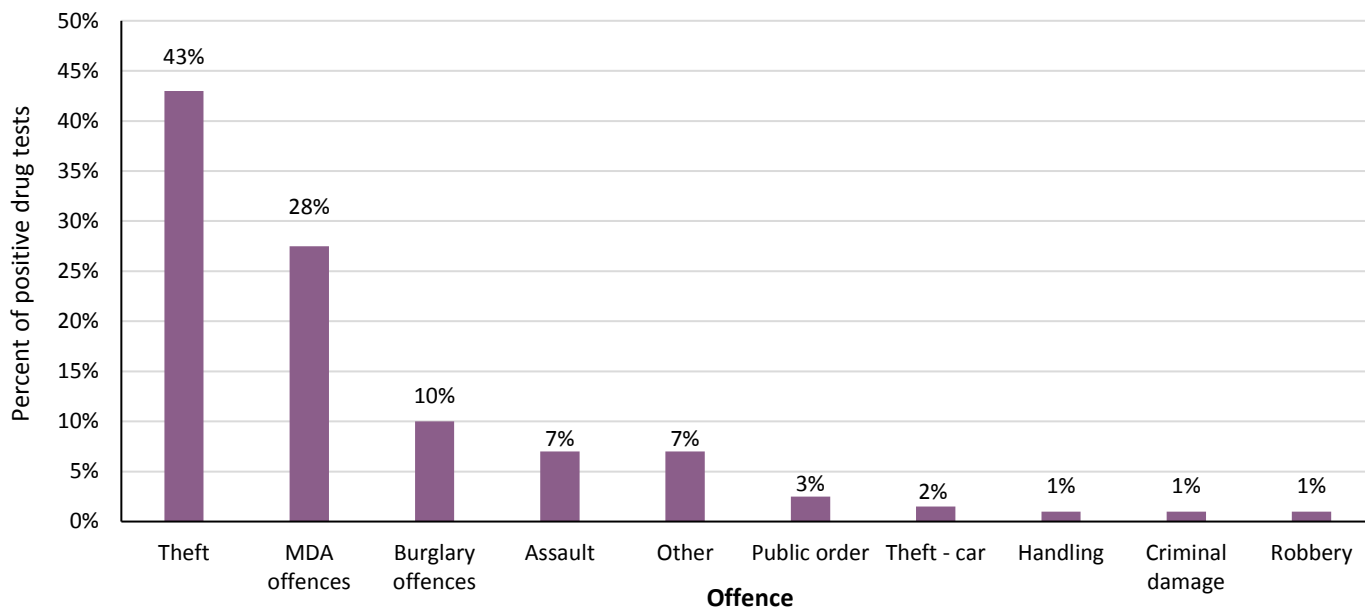
Of the 266 attempted drug tests on St Helens residents in 2017, 264 were successful tests and 200 were positive tests (76% of the successful tests were positive)⁸. Around three in five (59%) positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 101 [51%]; opiates only = 18 [9%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=81; 41%). The proportion of St Helens residents who tested positive for opiate metabolites was somewhat higher than Merseyside overall (53%).

⁷ This low number suggests issues with recording DAT of residence; numbers were also low in November 2016 for Sefton residents.

⁸ In 2017, 11% of all positive drug tests did not have a D(A)AT of residence recorded.

Theft accounted for the largest proportion of St Helens residents testing positive in 2017 (n=86; 43%), followed by 28% MDA offences (n=55; Figure 7). In comparison, data for all positive drug tests across Merseyside in 2017 reported a lower proportion of theft (38%) and a higher proportion of MDA offences (31%).

Figure 7: Positive drug tests for St Helens residents by offence (2017)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Over four in five (83%) St Helens residents testing positive in 2017 were male (n=166). This is the same proportion as the overall Merseyside figure.

St Helens residents aged 18-24 years accounted for the largest proportion of those testing positive in 2017 (n=46; 23%), followed by those aged 25-29 years (n=35; 18%; Figure 8). Proportions for these age groups are higher than those recorded across Merseyside.

Figure 8: Positive drug tests for St Helens residents by age group (2017)

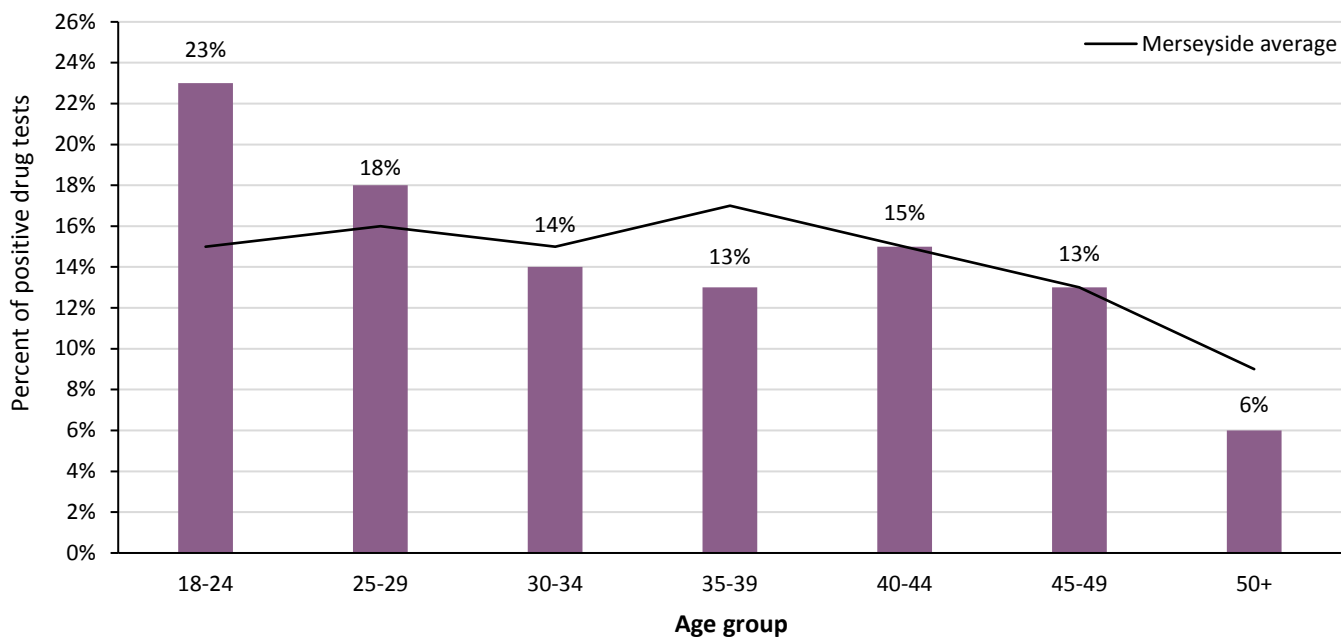


Table 4 shows some differences in age group proportions across gender for St Helens residents. Although there were smaller numbers of females, there was a larger proportion aged 35-39 years (29%) when compared to males (9%).

Table 4: Positive drug tests for St Helens residents by age group and gender (2017)

Age group	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
18-24	***	9%	<45	26%	46	23%
25-29	6	18%	29	17%	35	18%
30-34	***	12%	<25	14%	27	14%
35-39	10	29%	15	9%	25	13%
40-44	***	12%	<30	16%	30	15%
45-49	***	12%	<25	13%	26	13%
50+	***	9%	<10	5%	11	6%
Total	34	100%	166	100%	200	100%

The majority of St Helens residents arrested who tested positive in 2017 were White European (n=197; 99%), compared to 96% across Merseyside.

SUMMARY

- Between 2014 and 2017, attempted drug tests across Merseyside reduced by 74%. They reduced by 79% at St Helens custody suite (though the suite has been closed since mid-August 2017) and by 72% for St Helens residents across Merseyside (there was actually an increase in the number of tests on St Helens residents between 2016 and 2017).
- In 2017, there were 223 positive drug tests carried out at St Helens custody suite, compared to 200 St Helens residents testing positive across Merseyside.
- Over half (53%) of positive tests across Merseyside in 2017 were for opiate metabolites. The same proportion was recorded at St Helens custody suite, while it was slightly higher for St Helens residents (59%).
- Just under two in five (38%) positive tests across Merseyside in 2017 reported theft, while for tests carried out at St Helens custody suite and on St Helens residents it was 40% and 43% respectively.
- Across Merseyside, the majority (83%) were male. The same proportion was reported for St Helens residents, though it was higher for tests carried out at St Helens custody suite (88%).
- Those aged 18-24 years accounted for the largest proportion of positive tests at St Helens custody suite and for St Helens residents (19% and 23% respectively), while there were just 15% for this age group across Merseyside.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The drug testing process is the main criminal justice route whereby offenders who use drugs are identified and assessed for treatment. Local police drug testing data are not available through other reporting mechanisms; therefore this resource should be utilised by all stakeholders regularly. All partners in the DIP process should utilise available data which look at trends over time; for example, total attempted drug tests and positive drug test rates. This information will enable stakeholders to observe any changes and/or trends within their local area and across Merseyside, as well as investigate the reasons for these trends. This should assist in evidencing any process changes that may be needed, in addition to highlighting potential gaps or barriers that may affect prevent clients from engaging with treatment services.
- The number of attempted drug tests across Merseyside has decreased substantially (74% decrease between 2014 and 2017), which is likely due to the implementation of targeted testing. Targeted testing aimed to reduce the number of negative tests, and as this profile shows, the positive drug test rate has increased since its implementation. However, research suggests individuals who would be appropriate for treatment are not being drug tested under targeted testing. Collins et al. (2017b) found more than half of a cohort of individuals who tested positive for Class A drugs and continued to offend, were not drug tested at subsequent arrests. Therefore stakeholders should consider ways to increase drug testing and identify offenders for DIP intervention.
- The recording of the arrestee's D(A)AT of residence is valuable for treatment agencies in identifying individuals tested across Merseyside, and is even more critical in areas where there is no custody suite. Between 2014 and 2017, 18% of attempted drug tests were missing the D(A)AT of residence; however the completion of this data item has improved substantially since July 2017 (on average, completion of D[A]AT since July 2017 has been 100%). Merseyside Police should continue to ensure this information is recorded to enable more accurate analysis and a comprehensive understanding of the residents across the five Merseyside areas.
- The police drug testing dataset enables client profiling, including Class A drug use, offending, gender, age, ethnicity and residency. This information is key in identifying likely presenters through drug testing and DIP, and can impact on the resources and services required to cater for the needs of these individuals in an efficient manner in the custody suite, drug treatment service and/or local community. With resources and budgets constantly under scrutiny, this information should be used to ensure these individuals have a successful drug treatment experience. Furthermore, the dataset should be monitored in order to identify any changes in client profiling. For example, a previous drug testing report identified those aged 35-39 years accounted for the largest proportion of arrestees testing positive at St Helens custody suite in 2015/16 (Critchley and Whitfield, 2016), while this profile for 2017 shows the largest proportions for St Helens custody suite and St Helens residents across Merseyside were aged 18-24 years.
- It is imperative that there are effective and prompt communication channels between the police in the custody suites, the local treatment agency and all other relevant treatment agencies across Merseyside. Although organisational operations may differ considerably, an overarching aim of assisting offenders who use drugs towards treatment should be shared by all involved with DIP and facilitated as much as possible, with a clear understanding of the RA process. High levels of communication are particularly relevant when out of hours and when dealing with residents of Knowsley and St Helens, who currently do not have a local custody suite. Regular feedback of any issues arising should be encouraged and addressed, as well as adequate training where and when required.

These recommendations are unlikely to be achieved without sustained working between all stakeholders; however their implementation would likely ensure offenders who use drugs are referred to treatment services appropriately and have a successful and positive drug treatment experience.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Overview of figures by custody suite area (2017)⁹

	Liverpool	Sefton	St Helens	Wirral	Merseyside
Overview					
Attempted tests (n)	1,266	423	316	792	2,797
Successful tests (n & % ¹⁰)	1,254 (99%)	420 (99%)	315 (100%)	781 (99%)	2,770 (99%)
Positive tests (n & % ¹¹)	913 (73%)	334 (80%)	223 (71%)	621 (80%)	2,091 (75%)
Test results (%)					
Negative	27%	20%	29%	20%	25%
Positive	73%	80%	71%	80%	75%
<i>Cocaine only</i>	53%	48%	47%	40%	47%
<i>Opiates only</i>	5%	9%	7%	7%	6%
<i>Both (cocaine & opiates)</i>	42%	43%	47%	53%	46%
Midweek vs. weekend (%)					
Midweek	67%	69%	71%	69%	69%
Weekend	33%	31%	29%	31%	31%
% of tests carried out when staffed with drugs worker	81% midweek; 49% weekend	49%	40%	48% midweek; 31% weekend	n/a
Offence (%)					
MDA offences	35%	33%	27%	26%	31%
Theft	32%	35%	40%	46%	38%
Gender (%)					
Females	17%	21%	12%	17%	17%
Males	83%	79%	88%	83%	83%
Age group (%)					
18-24	17%	14%	19%	13%	15%
25-29	17%	17%	16%	15%	16%
30-34	15%	15%	18%	14%	15%
35-39	16%	17%	18%	17%	17%
40-44	15%	14%	12%	16%	15%
45-49	13%	14%	11%	15%	13%
50+	8%	9%	6%	11%	9%
Ethnicity (%)					
White European	95%	98%	99%	97%	96%
Area of residence (%)					
Knowsley	6%	12%	12%	2%	6%
Liverpool	76%	21%	19%	31%	47%
Sefton	5%	35%	5%	8%	11%
St Helens	2%	25%	59%	0%	11%
Wirral	5%	1%	1%	55%	20%
Outside of Merseyside	6%	8%	4%	4%	6%

⁹ All figures are for January to December 2017 only, although St Helens custody suite closed mid-August 2017. Excluding 'Overview' and 'Test results', figures are for positive tests only.

¹⁰ Per cent of attempted tests.

¹¹ Per cent of successful tests. This is different to the positive drug rate reported in the profile, which looks at individuals only.

Overview of figures by area of residence (2017)¹²

	Knowsley	Liverpool	Sefton	St Helens	Wirral	Merseyside ¹³
Overview						
Attempted tests (n)	154	1,187	257	266	476	2,797
Successful tests (n & % ¹⁴)	152 (99%)	1,172 (99%)	255 (99%)	264 (99%)	472 (99%)	2,770 (99%)
Positive tests (n & % ¹⁵)	111 (73%)	879 (75%)	207 (81%)	200 (76%)	367 (78%)	2,091 (75%)
Test results (%)						
Negative	27%	25%	19%	24%	22%	25%
Positive	73%	75%	81%	76%	78%	75%
<i>Cocaine only</i>	57%	47%	51%	41%	38%	47%
<i>Opiates only</i>	5%	6%	6%	9%	7%	6%
<i>Both (cocaine & opiates)</i>	38%	46%	43%	51%	55%	46%
Offence (%)						
MDA offences	36%	33%	30%	28%	24%	31%
Theft	26%	36%	34%	43%	49%	38%
Gender (%)						
Females	14%	18%	19%	17%	17%	17%
Males	86%	82%	81%	83%	83%	83%
Age group (%)						
18-24	19%	12%	14%	23%	14%	15%
25-29	16%	16%	16%	18%	14%	16%
30-34	11%	16%	20%	14%	11%	15%
35-39	13%	18%	20%	13%	19%	17%
40-44	11%	17%	10%	15%	13%	15%
45-49	15%	13%	12%	13%	16%	13%
50+	15%	8%	9%	6%	13%	9%
Ethnicity (%)						
White European	97%	96%	98%	99%	98%	96%

¹² All figures are for January to December 2017 only, although St Helens custody suite closed mid-August 2017. Excluding 'Overview' and 'Test results', figures are for positive tests only.

¹³ Merseyside figures are for drug tests across Merseyside, not Merseyside residents i.e. figures include drug tests for those resident outside of Merseyside.

¹⁴ Per cent of attempted tests.

¹⁵ Per cent of successful tests. This is different to the positive drug rate reported in the profile, which looks at individuals only.

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