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60% of public back calls for royal commission into drugs law

60% of Britons back calls for a review of drugs policy, and 54% support limited trials of the Portuguese approach

A majority (60%) of Britons disagree with the Prime Minister's decision to reject calls for a royal commission to consider decriminalising illegal drugs. The Home Affairs Select Committee made the recommendation for a royal commission on Monday, following a year-long Parliamentary inquiry, and highlighted Portugal's approach where drug possession has been decriminalised since 2001.

David Cameron has said there is no need for a royal commission because the current drugs policy is working, but Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has said he disagrees with the Prime Minister and that a royal commission should be convened.

According to our poll, 60% of the public support a royal commission to consider different drug policy options, including the current system of criminalisation, decriminalisation of drugs, or full legalisation, while 20% are opposed and 21% don't know. There is majority support for a royal commission across party lines, with 59% of Conservative voters, 62% of Labour supporters and 75% of Lib Dems in favour.

In 2001 Portugal decriminalised possession of drugs in an attempt to deal with a high rate of heroin addiction and HIV amongst drug users. People growing, dealing or trafficking drugs are still prosecuted, but possession of drugs for personal use has been decriminalised. Instead there has been increased investment in drug treatment programmes and harm reduction programmes. Since the policy was introduced there have been higher levels of drug treatment, the justice system has spent less time on drug-related crime, there has been less problem drug use, but a higher rate of overall reported drug use.

Asked if they would support or oppose a similar programme in the UK, 40% of the public say they would support it, 32% are opposed and 27% don't know. But 54% say they would support limited trials of the Portuguese approach in some British cities, while 27% are opposed to this and 19% say they don't know.

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Notes to editors:

Total sample size was 1,805 GB Adults aged 18+. Fieldwork was undertaken 11th– 12th December. The survey was carried out online. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

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