

Criminal Justice Project: Drug Interventions Programme



Wirral Drug Testing Profile (2014 to 2017)

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KEY FINDINGS

WIRRAL CUSTODY SUITE

- Between January 2014 and December 2017, 21% of the attempted drug tests across Merseyside were carried out at Wirral's custody suite (n=4,786).
- Attempted drug tests reduced by 58% between 2014 and 2015, and by 22% between 2015 and 2016. Notably, attempted drug tests increased by 6% in 2017 when compared to the previous year.
- The average positive drug test rate in both 2016 and 2017 was 79%, compared to 47% in 2014.
- There were 621 positive drug tests in 2017 (605 individuals).
- Three in five (60%) positive tests in 2017 were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 329 [53%]; opiates only = 46 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=246; 40%).
- Around seven in ten (69%) positive drug tests occurred midweek (n=431).
- Around half (48%) of positive drug tests during the week occurred when the custody suite was staffed by a drugs worker (09:00-17:00; n=209), compared to 31% at the weekend when the main staffed hours are between 12:00 and 17:00 (n=59). However, proportions at the weekend peaked between 10:00 and 11:59 (n=40; 21%), during which time the custody suite was not staffed by a drugs worker.
- Forty-six per cent of positive drug test records in 2017 reported theft (n=285), followed by 26% Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (n=160).
- Over four in five (83%) were male (n=514).
- Those aged 35-39 years and 40-44 years accounted for the largest proportions of those testing positive in 2017 (17% and 16% respectively).
- The majority were White European (n=603; 97%).
- Over half (55%) were resident in Wirral (n=326), while 31% were resident in Liverpool (n=185).

WIRRAL RESIDENTS

- Between January 2014 and December 2017, 15% of the attempted drug tests carried out across Merseyside were Wirral residents (n=3,371).
- The majority of Wirral residents were drug tested in Wirral (n=2,863; 85%).
- Attempted drug tests reduced by 54% between 2014 and 2015, and by 45% between 2015 and 2016. Notably, attempted tests increased by 11% in 2017 when compared to the previous year.
- There were 367 positive drug tests in 2017.
- Over three in five (62%) positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 201 [55%]; opiates only = 27 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=139; 38%).
- Around half (49%) of the positive drug test records in 2017 reported theft (n=181), followed by 24% MDA offences (n=87).
- Over four in five (83%) were male (n=306).
- Around one in five (19%) were aged 35-39 years (n=68).
- The majority were White European (n=358; 98%).

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 Wirral 48% 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 Wirral presents information on drug tests carried out at Wirral custody suite and on Wirral 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.

WIRRAL 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.

Of the attempted drug tests across Merseyside, one in five (21%) were carried out at Wirral's custody suite (n=4,786; Table 1). The number of attempted drug tests at Wirral's custody suite reduced by 58% between 2014 and 2015¹, and by 22% between 2015 and 2016. However, the number of tests increased by 6% in 2017 when compared to the previous year.

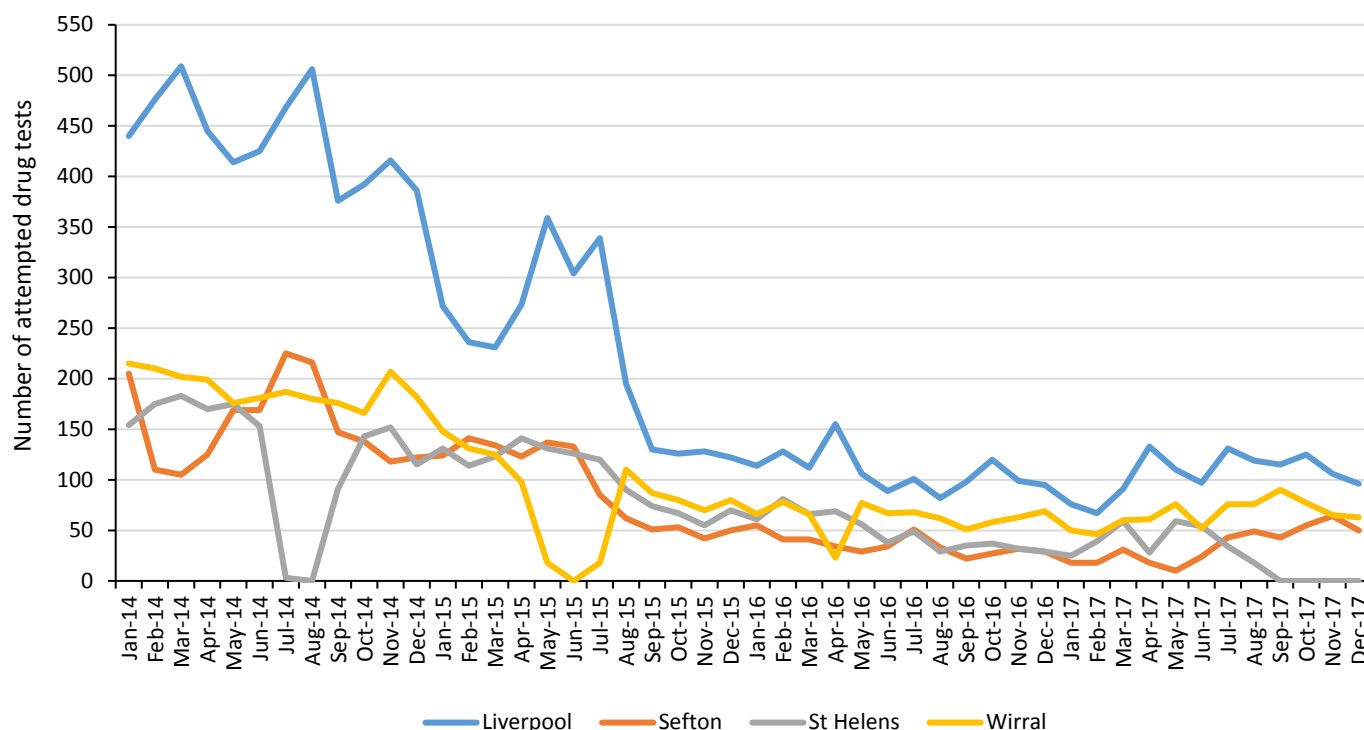
¹ Targeted testing was piloted in Wirral and was the first custody suite to have this in place (January 2015), while it was not fully implemented across Merseyside until August 2015. This could suggest why the largest decrease in tests in Wirral is between 2014 and 2015, while it is between 2015 and 2016 across Merseyside overall.

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 Wirral with Liverpool, Sefton and St Helens (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 Wirral custody suite was closed², the lowest number of tests was recorded in February 2017 (n=46), while tests were highest in January 2014 (n=215) and February 2014 (n=210).

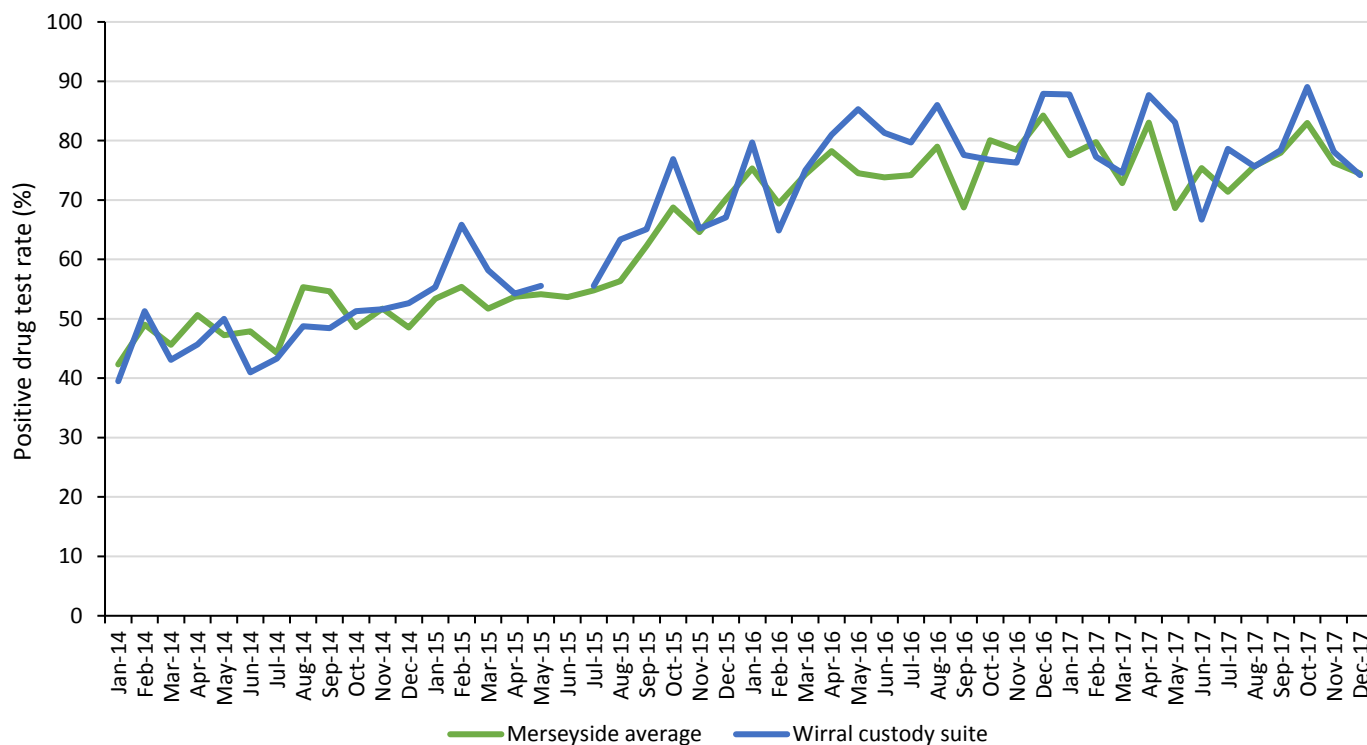
Figure 1: Number of attempted drug tests by custody suite area and month/year (2014-17)



² Wirral custody suite was closed part of May 2015, all of June 2015, part of July 2015 and part of April 2016. During this time arrestees were generally taken to Liverpool and Figure 1 shows an increase in drug tests carried out in Liverpool when Wirral custody suite was closed.

The positive drug test rate³ for those drug tested in Wirral increased year on year between 2014 and 2016 (Figure 2). The average positive drug test rate in both 2016 and 2017 was 79%, compared to 47% in 2014.

Figure 2: Positive drug test rate by month/year, Wirral custody suite and Merseyside (2014-17)⁴



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

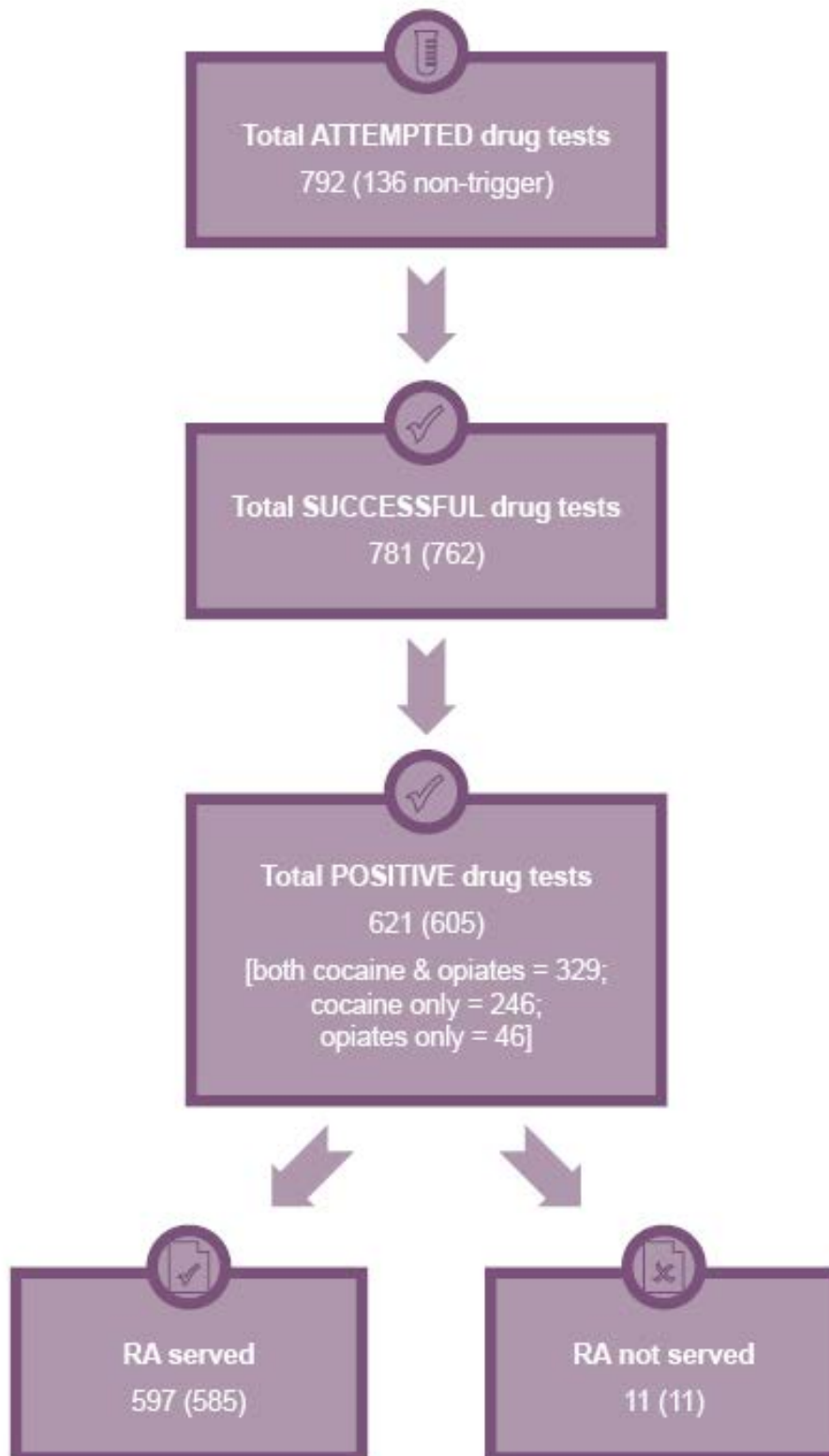
Figure 3 shows the drug testing activity for those arrested and drug tested at Wirral’s custody suite between January and December 2017. There were a total of 792 attempted drug tests in 2017; of which 781 were successful (762 individuals). Of the individuals successfully tested, 605 individuals tested positive. This represents a positive drug test rate of 79% in 2017, which is higher than the average positive drug test rate for Merseyside (74%).

Three in five (60%) of the 621 positive tests in 2017 were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 329 [53%]; opiates only = 46 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=246; 40%). The proportion that tested positive for opiate metabolites is somewhat higher than that for Merseyside (53%).

³ Positive drug test rate = (number of individuals testing positive ÷ number of individuals successfully tested) x 100.

⁴ There were no drug tests in June 2015 due to the custody suite being closed.

Figure 3: Drug testing activity in Wirral custody suite (2017)⁵

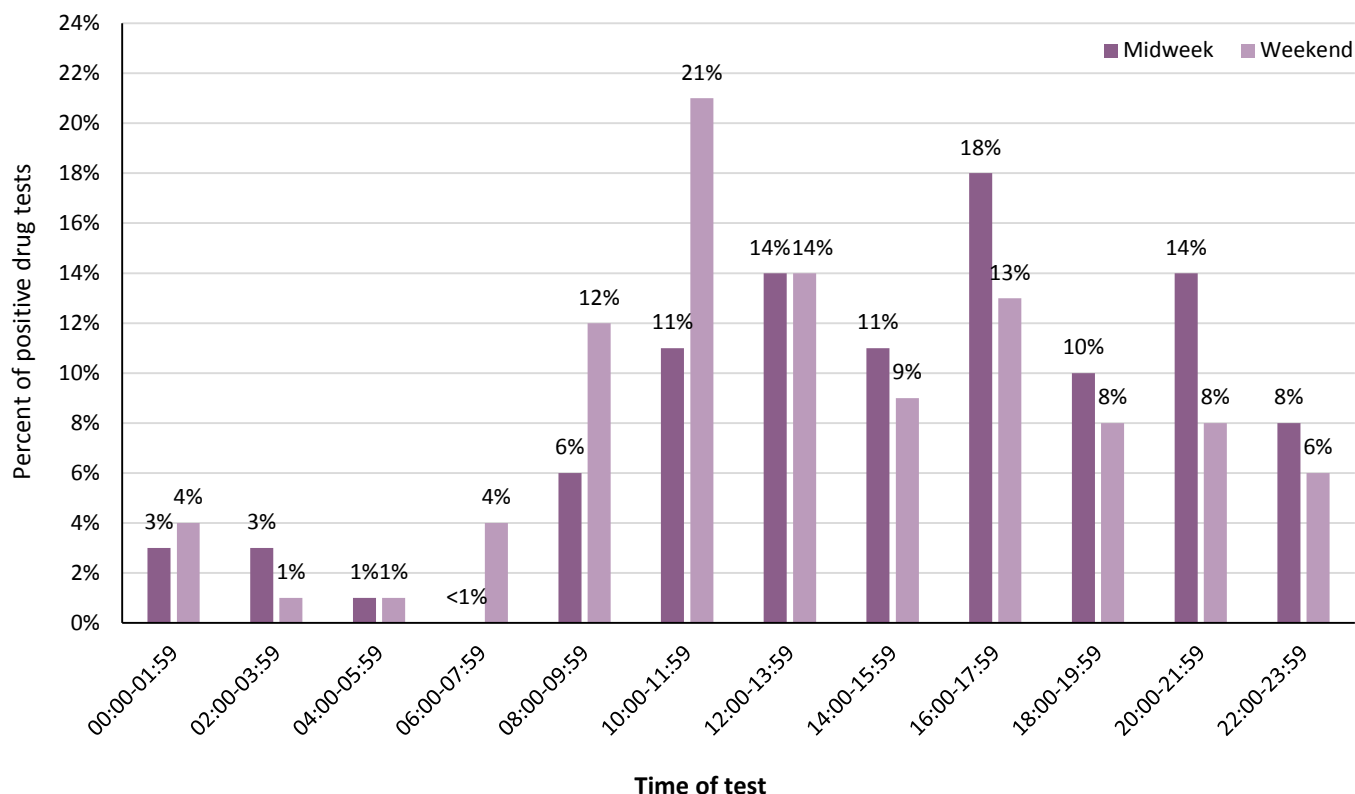


⁵ Numbers of individuals at each level are presented in brackets. 'Total attempted drug tests' is a summation of successful tests and those that were refused or aborted. 'RA served' and 'RA not served' indicate the number of occasions when those testing positive were either served or not served with 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'.

Of the 621 positive drug tests carried out at Wirral custody suite in 2017, around seven in ten (69%) occurred midweek (n=431). This is the same proportion as all positive drug tests across Merseyside.

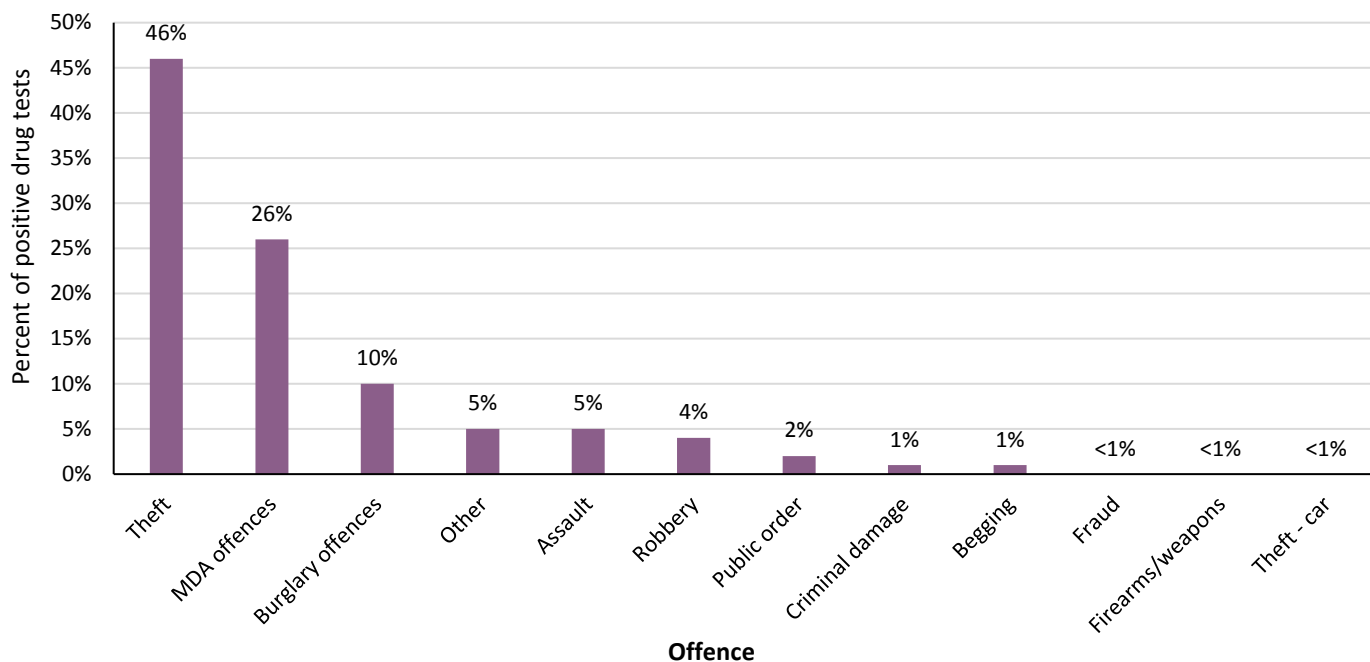
Around half (48%) of positive drug tests during the week occurred when the custody suite was staffed by a drugs worker (09:00-17:00; n=209), compared to 31% at the weekend when the staffed hours are between 12:00 and 17:00 (n=59). Figure 4 shows the proportions of positive drug tests by time of test, making comparisons between those which occurred during the week and at the weekend. Positive drug tests during the week peaked between 16:00 and 17:59 (n=77; 18%), followed by between 12:00 and 13:59 (n=61; 14%) and between 20:00 and 21:59 (n=60; 14%). Notably, the number of tests at the weekend peaked between 10:00 and 11:59 (n=40; 21%), during which time the custody suite was not staffed by a drugs worker.

Figure 4: Positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite by time of test, midweek vs. weekend (2017)



Police drug testing data capture the offence that led to the arrest and subsequent drug test. Theft accounted for the largest proportion (n=285; 46%), followed by Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (n=160; 26%) and burglary offences (n=59; 10%; Figure 5). 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 5: Positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite by offence (2017)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Males accounted for over four in five (83%) positive drug tests in Wirral in 2017 (n=514), which is the same proportion as the overall Merseyside figure.

Figure 6 shows arrestees aged 35-39 years accounted for the largest proportion of those testing positive in 2017 at Wirral’s custody suite (n=105; 17%), followed by those aged 40-44 years (n=100; 16%). The age profile is similar to the overall Merseyside figures.

Figure 6: Positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite by age group (2017)

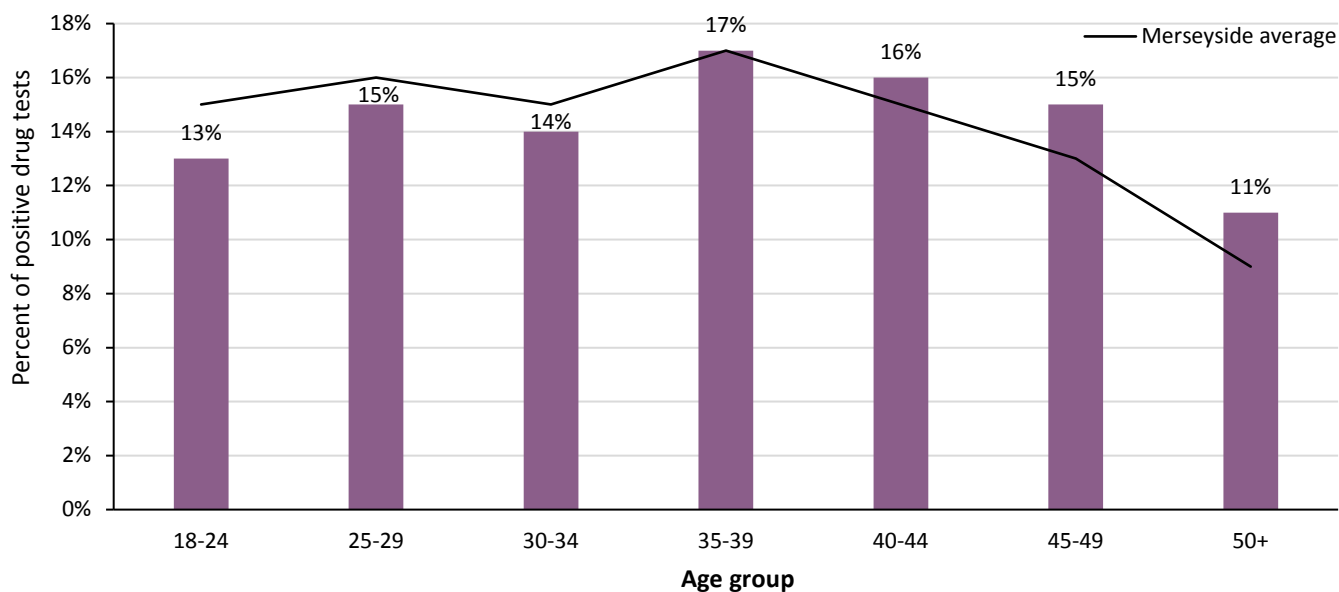


Table 2 shows some differences in age group proportions across gender in Wirral. Although there were smaller numbers of females, there were larger proportions aged 30-34 years, 40-44 years and 45-49 years (17%, 18% and 20% respectively) when compared to males (13%, 16% and 13% respectively).

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

Age group	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
18-24	8	7%	71	14%	79	13%
25-29	14	13%	77	15%	91	15%
30-34	18	17%	68	13%	86	14%
35-39	16	15%	89	17%	105	17%
40-44	19	18%	81	16%	100	16%
45-49	21	20%	69	13%	90	14%
50+	11	10%	59	11%	70	11%
Total	107	100%	514	100%	621	100%

The majority of those arrested who tested positive in Wirral's custody suite in 2017 were White European (n=603; 97%), compared to 96% across Merseyside. Over half (55%) were resident in Wirral (n=326), while around three in ten (31%) were resident in Liverpool (n=185)⁶.

WIRRAL RESIDENTS

OVERVIEW

Of the 22,808 attempted drug tests across Merseyside between January 2014 and December 2017, 15% were carried out on Wirral residents (n=3,371). 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 Wirral residents arrested and drug tested across Merseyside.

The majority (85%) of Wirral residents were tested at Wirral's custody suite (n=2,863; Table 3). Attempted drug tests on Wirral residents more than halved between 2014 and 2015 (54% decrease), followed by a 45% reduction between 2015 and 2016. Notably, attempted drug tests increased by 11% in 2017 when compared to the previous year, which is likely attributed to an increase in the recording of D(A)AT of residence in 2017⁷.

⁶ Drug (and Alcohol) Action Team (D[A]AT) of residence was missing for 29 records of the positive drug tests carried out in Wirral.

⁷ Records missing D(A)AT of residence: 2014=17%; 2015=21%; 2016=25%; 2017=11%.

Table 3: Number of attempted drug tests for Wirral residents by custody suite area and year (2014-17)⁸

Area	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Liverpool	128	200	53	50	431
Sefton	<15	38	<10	***	58
St Helens	***	12	***	***	19
Wirral	1,551	525	367	420	2,863
Total	1,692	775	428	476	3,371

Figure 7 shows the number of attempted drug tests across Merseyside for Wirral residents by month and year, clearly demonstrating the reduction in the number of tests between 2014 and 2016. There was a substantial drop in numbers between December 2014 (n=146) and January 2015 (n=104), when targeted testing was first introduced as a pilot in Wirral custody suite. The lowest number of attempted tests for Wirral residents was in January 2017 and February 2017 (n=24 and 23 respectively), while tests were highest in January 2014 (n=166).

Figure 7: Number of attempted drug tests for Wirral residents by month/year (2014-17)



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

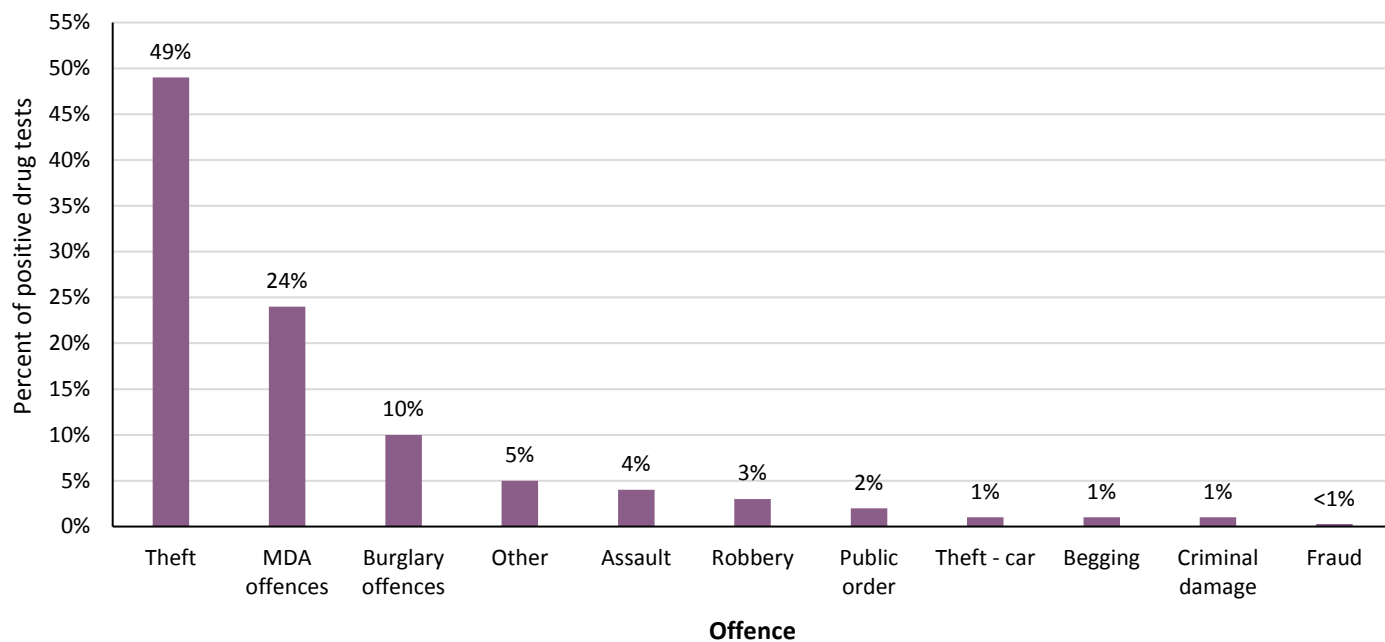
Of the 476 attempted drug tests on Wirral residents in 2017, 472 were successful tests and 367 were positive tests (78% of the successful tests were positive)⁹. Over three in five (62%) positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 201 [55%]; opiates only = 27 [7%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=139; 38%). The proportion of Wirral residents who tested positive for opiate metabolites was somewhat higher than Merseyside overall (53%).

⁸ Throughout this report numbers less than five have been suppressed (with ***) to maintain confidentiality.

⁹ In 2017, 11% of all positive drug tests did not have a D(A)AT of residence recorded.

Around half (49%) of Wirral residents testing positive in 2017 were arrested for theft offences (n=181), followed by around one-quarter (24%) for MDA offences (n=87) and one in ten (10%) burglary offences (n=37; Figure 8). 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 8: Positive drug tests for Wirral residents by offence (2017)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Over four in five (83%) Wirral residents testing positive in 2017 were male (n=306). This is the same proportion as the overall Merseyside figure.

Positive drug tests for Wirral residents peaked in those aged 35-39 years (n=68; 19%; Figure 9). The proportion for this age group is slightly higher than those recorded across Merseyside (17%).

Figure 9: Positive drug tests for Wirral residents by age group (2017)

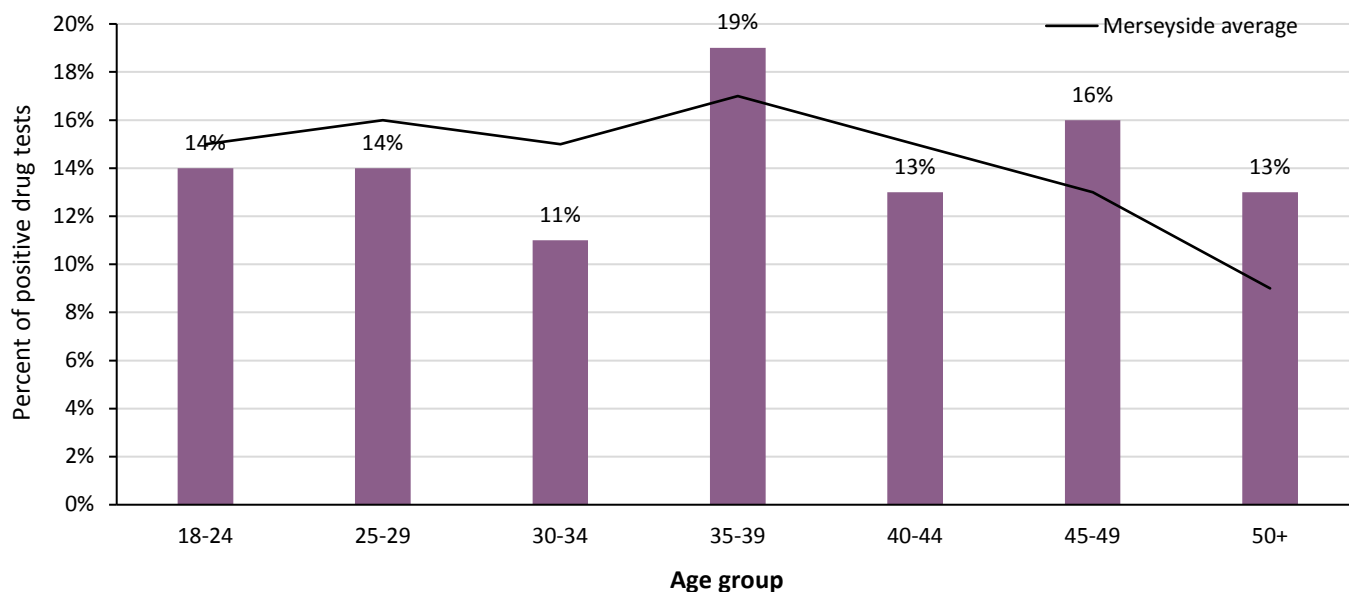


Table 4 shows some differences in age group proportions across gender for Wirral residents. Although there were smaller numbers of females, there were larger proportions aged 30-34 years, 35-39 years and 45-49 years (all 20% each) when compared to males (10%, 18% and 15% respectively).

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

Age group	Females		Males		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
18-24	***	7%	<50	15%	51	14%
25-29	7	11%	45	15%	52	14%
30-34	12	20%	30	10%	42	11%
35-39	12	20%	56	18%	68	19%
40-44	6	10%	42	14%	48	13%
45-49	12	20%	47	15%	59	16%
50+	<10	13%	<40	13%	47	13%
Total	61	100%	306	100%	367	100%

The majority of Wirral residents arrested who tested positive in 2017 were White European (n=358; 98%), compared to 96% across Merseyside.

SUMMARY

- Between 2014 and 2017, attempted drug tests across Merseyside reduced by 74%. They reduced by 65% at Wirral's custody suite and by 72% for Wirral residents across Merseyside (there was actually an increase in the number of tests in Wirral and on Wirral residents between 2016 and 2017).
- In 2017, there were 621 positive drug tests carried out at Wirral's custody suite, compared to 367 Wirral residents testing positive across Merseyside.
- Over half (53%) of positive tests across Merseyside in 2017 were for opiate metabolites, while higher proportions were recorded at Wirral's custody suite and for Wirral residents across Merseyside (60% and 62% respectively).
- Around seven in ten (69%) positive drug test results across Merseyside in 2017 occurred midweek, with the same proportion reported in Wirral.
- Just under two in five (38%) positive tests across Merseyside in 2017 reported theft offences, while it was higher for tests carried out at Wirral's custody suite and for tests carried out on Wirral residents (46% and 49% respectively).
- Across Merseyside, the majority (83%) were male. The same proportion was reported for Wirral's custody suite and Wirral residents.
- Those aged 35-39 years accounted for the largest proportion of positive tests across Merseyside in 2017 (17%), as well as those carried out in Wirral and on Wirral residents (17% and 19% respectively).

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 prevent these 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 (Critchley and Whitfield, 2016) and this 2017 profile show those aged 35-39 years and 40-44 years accounted for the largest proportions of arrestees testing positive at Wirral custody suite; however the proportions for these age groups in 2017 are smaller than those in 2015/16, showing more of a fluctuation across age for those testing positive in 2017.
- 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.

- This report found 48% of positive drug tests during the week occurred when Wirral custody suite was staffed by a drugs worker (09:00-17:00), compared to 31% at the weekend when the main staffed hours are between 12:00 and 17:00. Notably, the number of tests at the weekend peaked between 10:00 and 11:59, during which time the custody suite was not staffed by a drugs worker. Wirral Ways to Recovery should review their coverage time at the custody suite at weekends, which could assist in more effective targeting of resources.

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)¹⁰

	Liverpool	Sefton	St Helens	Wirral	Merseyside
Overview					
Attempted tests (n)	1,266	423	316	792	2,797
Successful tests (n & %¹¹)	1,254 (99%)	420 (99%)	315 (100%)	781 (99%)	2,770 (99%)
Positive tests (n & %¹²)	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%

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Per cent of attempted tests.

¹² 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)¹³

	Knowsley	Liverpool	Sefton	St Helens	Wirral	Merseyside ¹⁴
Overview						
Attempted tests (n)	154	1,187	257	266	476	2,797
Successful tests (n & % ¹⁵)	152 (99%)	1,172 (99%)	255 (99%)	264 (99%)	472 (99%)	2,770 (99%)
Positive tests (n & % ¹⁶)	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%

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Merseyside figures are for drug tests across Merseyside, not Merseyside residents i.e. figures include drug tests for those resident outside of Merseyside.

¹⁵ Per cent of attempted tests.

¹⁶ 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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