

Tory: 'Provide free heroin to help cut crime'

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

HEROIN addicts should be given free drugs, according to a Medway councillor.

River ward representative Craig Mackinlay said the controversial scheme – currently being piloted in Brighton, London and Darlington – should also be tested in Medway.

The Tory said controlled heroin handouts would lead to a fall in the number of drug-related crimes committed across the towns.

The cost of the scheme stands at £15,000 per user – three times the cost of Methadone treatment – but Cllr Mackinlay said this would be a small price to pay.

"If the additional annual cost of £10,000 per user under treatment is equated to the 300 crimes saved per year per user, this represents unbelievably good value to the community," he said.

"River ward has the highest crime rate in Medway, with central Chatham at the heart of the prostitution and drugs trade.

"No prostitute – 95 per cent of whom have a class A drug addiction – has chosen prostitution as a career. They are simply slaves to a trade as a means to fund their drug habit.

"It would be better to provide clean heroin, medically supervised, as an alternative to their degrading lifestyle which harms communities."

More than 120 "entrenched heroin users" have been taking part in the trials. Initial results have shown the users' weekly spend on street drugs has fallen from £300 a week to £50 in six months.

Drug-related crime has also reduced from 40 per month to 13. Despite the success, police chiefs are reluctant to adopt the scheme.

Chief Superintendent Steve Corbishley, Area Commander for



RADICAL: Craig Mackinlay believes the free heroin pilot scheme could work in Medway

Medway and chair of Medway Drug and Alcohol Action Team, said: "Councillor Mackinlay has been a great supporter of both the work of the police and the action team. The areas in this pilot are not comparable to Medway, with far higher drug related crime despite their participation in the scheme.

"Medway Drug and Alcohol Action Team has a focus on identifying the needs of those who suffer from either drug or alcohol problems. Our activity is comprehensive and includes not only treatment but also education.

"We also have a comprehensive offender management unit. This targets individuals who may, through their addiction, be likely to commit crime. This has been extremely successful and is one of the reasons why we see only two burglaries a day in Medway.

"I recognise the problems in River ward and we will be working with the community, including Cllr Mackinlay, to further improve the quality of life for people in that area."