



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,  
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

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## **POA Circular 094/2020**

4<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NUMBER 9: COVID-19**

As I have indicated in previous updates the POA have been in discussions with HMPPS regarding the medium term recovery plan. HMPPS have agreed wording to the National Framework with the POA and other recognised Unions within HMPPS. On Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, the Secretary of State Robert Buckland QC made a Ministerial statement endorsing the National Framework. I am also pleased to announce that the POA and HMPPS are working on the wording of another joint statement which will be signed off by the CEO Jo Farrer, Director General Phil Copple, POA National Chairman Mark Fairhurst and myself to continue this essential piece of work in a continued collaborative approach.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are entering into probably the most important phase in order to keep POA members safe along with those in our care. Remember in the initial modelling it was predicted that there could be several thousand deaths in our prisons. That did not materialise, but we are not out of danger yet. We have suffered deaths of staff and prisoners and that is extremely sad and our condolences are with the family and friends of the deceased. I do not want to see any more people die in HMPPS but being realistic there is every chance that sadly illness and more people dying could occur and that is why unnecessary risks are not an option.

At the very heart of the National Framework going forward in preparation for relaxing regimes the priority of Preservation of life must be maintained. It is essential to protect POA members, the public and those in our care that we take every precaution to minimise deaths and hospitalisation. We can only do this by continuing what we have been doing since the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 and only allowing relaxation of regimes when it is safe to do so.

There may well be a temptation to relax regimes too quickly which in my view will not be safe. There is much confusion already in Government announcements in our communities with disagreements on scientific evidence. There can be no confusion in our Prisons and there must be clear guidance and consistency in how we operate if we are to maintain wellbeing for all. There can be no room for interpretation on what regimes are agreed going forward.

Ensuring the ongoing stability and safety of the estate, including the risk of disorder, violence, suicide, self harm or escapes must also be a priority. HMPPS and POA will work in partnership to deliver regimes and rehabilitative activities as intended and continue to protect the public. This is crucial to safeguarding the mental and physical health of staff and those in our care.

Over the coming weeks the POA at National and Local Level will be at the heart of making decisions with Senior Officials and Local Management to restart aspects of daily prison life, with adaptations where necessary to ensure safety. National guidance will ensure there is consistency and safe systems of work and risk assessments will certainly be at the heart of that work. It is essential that all Local Committee's ensure they are getting adequate facility time as we have agreed that process with the Director General. HMPPS know the value of the POA at Local and National level and as the only recognised Union for unified grades the POA will play a major role in moving the medium term plan forward both locally and nationally in a safe manner. We know that progress may differ from Prison to Prison and Area to Area depending on the advice from Public Health England.

Exceptional Delivery Models will be the key to how measures are taken at each stage and this will take time to work through locally and nationally to ensure the safe and secure delivery of services.

Once again in HMPPS communication will be key with Prisoners in our care. Everything must continue to be explained and the rationale behind the decisions. This will be a major factor in the success of the medium term recovery plan but as stated previously there is no quick fix and we need to get it right to preserve life and to ensure COVID-19 is reduced as much as possible.

There have been many rumours that certain activities will occur straight away. That is simply not true and everything will be done in a controlled manner and gradually eased if at all possible. There will be a new way of working in HMPPS for the foreseeable future and every POA member must ensure that where agreement is reached on certain activities that they adhere to those agreements and that local Management teams also adhere to those agreements which will be underpinned by risk assessments and safe systems of work.

Obviously separate arrangements will follow for POA members in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the Scottish National Committee and Area Committee in Northern Ireland will be fully involved as the recognised Union in those countries. It must also be realised that Welsh Prisons although part of England and Wales service their Health advice may differ from those given by Public Health England and clearly local committee's and NEC must also be alert to that fact.

The POA Nationally are continuing to liaise with our Local Committee's in the Private Sector and we continue with a good relationship with those Private providers having regular dialogue with Director's where we have recognition rights. In respect of the Special Hospitals regular meetings are taking place with local committee's and indeed the NHS Official side through the NHS Trade Union side and agreements have been reached in respect of COVID-19 which have been highlighted in the media.

Going forward the work will intensify regarding Exceptional Delivery Models but do not expect much change to regimes until this work is progressed.

I am grateful to the POA membership for their exceptional work during these difficult times and the POA NEC will continue to raise matters on your behalf to ensure that we do our very best to minimise the effects of this dreadful pandemic. I would also thank the POA support staff who continue to work from home and to ensure the volume of work is met to a very high standard. Keep safe everyone and further information in relation to the medium term recovery as it becomes available will be promulgated to the membership.

Your Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Gillan', with a small flourish at the end.

**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary