



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

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Dear Colleagues

GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NUMBER 8: COVID-19

The Prime Minister on Sunday 10th May 2020 took the first steps in easing the coronavirus lockdown in a pre-recorded message stating he wants to encourage people to take more and unlimited amounts of outdoor exercise provided they stick to social distancing guidelines and stay two metres apart.

It was also announced that anyone who cannot work from home-such as those in construction and manufacturing should be actively encouraged to go to work.

The Government have also produced a 50-page road map on the way forward regarding relaxation of the restrictions. At the moment the easing of restrictions in our communities only apply to England. In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales their respective assemblies and Government have not introduced the same measures in those respective countries.

As of 17.00hrs on Monday 18th May 2020;

- 422 prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 across 74 prisons
- 542 prison staff have tested positive for COVID-19 across 72 prisons
- 23 prisoner escort and custody services (PECS) staff have tested positive for COVID-19

POA members no matter where you work have always had to go to work as key workers when fit and well to do so. But of course, as with any announcements by Government in respect of COVID-19 much speculation will follow and Employers looking at their own road to recovery and HMPPS and other Employers where we have members will be looking to do the same. I know that the Scottish National Committee will continue their discussions with the Scottish Prison Service as will the Northern Ireland Area Committee in respect of the Prison Service in Northern Ireland. The NEC will be in a constructive dialogue with HMPPS Private Sector, Immigration Services, and the Welsh Assembly. In the Isle of Man, we will continue

to liaise and support our members. A letter signed by the POA along with 15 other Health Unions has been sent out in respect of our members in the Psychiatric Hospitals on our expectations on a safe way forward. Wherever POA members work we will be there for you on finding and discussing a way forward.

The POA NEC will work in a collaborative approach with HMPPS and Government officials as we have done since the start of this pandemic. I was heartened to hear in a recent discussion with the CEO Jo Farrer and indeed separately with the Director General Phil Cople that although there has been a relaxation in our communities there will not be a rushed change within our Prison settings. Everyone knows that within a closed setting it is different, and it is only because of the collaborative approach with employer, the POA and Government in setting strict guidelines and our members hard work that we have managed to contain the spread. In fact, previous modelling suggested far worse scenarios in our Prisons and thankfully they have not evolved so far.

This is not a time to take our eye off the ball. COVID-19 is a killer as we know, and I do not want anymore families suffering from the deaths of their loved ones as we have witnessed since the 23rd March 2020. That is why regime discipline will be essential going forward. During the recovery period in the medium term which could last between 12 and 18 months there will be a production of a National Framework with exceptional delivery models being produced. I do not expect to see an increase in regime delivery straight away but gradually only when safe to do so. This approach will need discipline and clear and concise instructions from the centre. It may well mean that different regions move at different times in regimes depending on the evidence and guidance from experts such as Public Health England.

The Government have appointed Lord Paul Deighton as the “TSAR” for COVID-19 with regards to PPE and its supply on an ongoing basis. I had discussions with Lord Deighton on issues pertaining to PPE not just in the short term but the long term as well because no one really knows the time span on this pandemic. He understood the issues of confidence in the knowledge that the correct PPE will be available, and that Prisons, Care Homes and Hospitals are different to other parts of the community. There is much confusion about PPE such as who should wear clinical masks, and discussions about other face coverings. He recognised there needs to be more clarity and indeed the Prison Service recognises there needs to be more clarity on this issue going forward. This was a most welcome and positive meeting.

The POA will proceed with caution in our discussions on a way forward. It is critical that any workforce believes the Employer and Government has their interests at heart in moving plans forward. The POA will not be a spectator on the side-line of these critical discussions and will be at the heart of the National Framework in moving forward. If it is not safe or going to quickly that endangers our members or indeed those in our care, then we will articulate those arguments to both employer and Government. We will continue to work in a joint manner and as I have stated previously this should not be seen as a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. The wealth of knowledge that the NEC bring to the table has brought change to the detail of instructions and that work will continue at pace. The POA have been active in the media on your behalf with sensible input. We have demonstrated that in

tough times we will lead from the front in difficult decisions in keeping everyone as safe as they possibly can be in these circumstances.

The POA Welfare Fund continues to assist our members and their families in difficult times. Our stress line which is confidential is available and our website has a dedicated section with up to date information purely on COVID-19.

Our members have consistently demonstrated their commitment and professionalism on a daily basis, local officials have been immense in assisting their members locally. The NEC continue with policy work with HMPPS and the support staff work hard behind the scenes on your behalf to keep the POA administered to a high standard. I thank each and every one of you and reiterate that COVID-19 is a silent and unseen killer. We need to make sure that there is no complacency going forward just because there is a relaxation of the lockdown out-with our Prisons. Regime discipline going forward is crucial and we need to ensure that any agreements are adhered to without taking risks.

Your Sincerely

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

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary