



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

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## POA Circular 057/2020

10<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **NATIONAL CHAIR UPDATE APRIL 2020**

During these unprecedented times it is vital that we continue to keep you updated on issues and plans throughout the Service.

Please ensure all members have sight of this update.

### **CENTER PARCS**

I have communicated to all major Hotel chains in the UK to source accommodation that Prison Officers can utilise whilst they are on duty. I know some members do not wish to return home due to the risks involved in being on duty. Center Parcs have kindly offered use of their self-catering chalets at their 5 sites in the UK. These sites are located in Norfolk, Bedfordshire, Wiltshire, Nottinghamshire and Cumbria.

The plan is to offer this facility from Friday April 17<sup>th</sup>, reviewed every 2 weeks to ensure that their business can get back online if circumstances change. They could offer Self Catering Accommodation either in single occupant apartments (subject to quantity required) or multi / single occupant lodges. They are not operating any Food & Beverage units or Leisure facilities at this moment in time, however restricted access to parts of the village for exercise could be arranged. The POA have agreed to cover the small service charge per night for any member wishing to access this facility. If you wish to take up this offer please inform me via e mail at [nicola@poauk.org.uk](mailto:nicola@poauk.org.uk) and I will forward you all the necessary details.

If any more hotel chains offer their facilities, I will update you.

### **TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT OF FORMER STAFF**

HMPPS are writing to 9000 former Prison Officer grades who have left or retired from the Service over the last 5 years to offer them temporary contracts to enhance our capabilities during the COVID 19 crisis. The abatement rules on pensions has been relaxed and I am pleased that this POA suggestion has been approved by Government. This means that those who are in receipt of their pension can return full time if they wish without a detriment to their pension payments. I have asked about abatement rules for our colleagues who are currently working part time and drawing their pensions. It is likely that rules for this group of staff will also be relaxed. As soon as I receive confirmation, I will update you.

### **KEY WORKERS AT SUPERMARKETS**

I have been made aware of issues with some supermarkets that do not recognise Prison Staff as frontline personnel and are insisting that we cannot access time slots reserved for frontline key workers such as the NHS. I am addressing this issue and asking all major supermarket chains to give Prison Staff the same courtesy as other frontline public sector workers. I would appreciate your assistance with this so please feel free to communicate with your local supermarkets who fail to recognise us. You can also get your local MP involved.

### **REGIME RESTRICTIONS**

The restrictions remain in place and should be adhered to. The NEC are receiving reports that some Prisons have allowed social gatherings in chapels and are unlocking excessive amounts of prisoners. Now is not the time for appeasement or good intentions. We need to ensure we are all safe. If you are concerned about operational protocols being ignored or circumnavigated, please highlight these to your committee in the first instance. Your area NEC Representative will liaise with your local committee to ensure the necessary restrictions are adhered to.

### **HMIP INSPECTIONS**

We have recently been informed that HMIP intend to conduct one day, announced visits that will look at the key essentials of safety, care and the basic rights of those detained. These will not be inspection visits and will not be testing establishments against usual expectations, although findings will be published.

The POA have raised objections to what we see as unnecessary distractions at a time of National Emergency. HMPPS intend to support these visits and they will commence in the near future. No Prisons have yet been announced for inspection.

### **TEMPORARY RISK ASSESSMENTS AND SAFE SYSTEMS OF WORK**

During this period HMPPS has implemented a range of temporary measures that the POA and other recognised trade unions have been consulted on. These includes escorts, hospital guards, reception procedures and searching of the prisoner. You should note that every measure has been taken to protect you and if you have any concerns you should liaise with your local POA committee who will resolve them by engaging with your SMT. I should reiterate that you will not be placed at risk carrying out any tasks that have now had to be revised due to COVID 19.

### **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

PPE has now been delivered to all Regional Hubs. There is another substantial order on its way which is due to arrive early next week. I am receiving mixed reports about the availability of PPE. The majority of branches have informed me they are content and have sufficient PPE. If you have an issue with its use or the availability of PPE, please inform your local committee who may escalate this to the area NEC Representative.

### **COVID 19 TESTING FOR STAFF**

The Secretary of State has confirmed that Prison Staff will be prioritised for COVID 19 tests. We await an appropriate testing protocol to be approved but this should happen imminently with testing planned to begin within the next week. As soon as HMPPS confirm when the tests will begin, including the process and sites for testing I will update you.

### **BONUS PAYMENTS**

The employer has confirmed that any Officer who is acting up to an operational Governor post will be paid the appropriate monthly bonus but will not be eligible for any Payment Plus. This is a u turn from previous plans to deny this group of staff this payment. I am pleased that the intervention of the POA has been acted upon. We await clarity on OSG grades being included in the monthly bonus that bands 3-5 are entitled to. Indications are that this will be approved. The POA will not accept anything less for our colleagues at this grade.

### **PP BONUS SCHEME**

We are receiving reports that some Governors are denying access to the PP bonus scheme because they have enough staff and do not think it is necessary at this point. This is inaccurate. There are no monetary restrictions on the number of volunteers and this scheme should be utilised immediately to cater for future depletions in staffing numbers. The additional funding has been secured from Government and does not come out of existing budgets. This scheme offers resilience and can be used for bedguards and constant watch. Local committees should address any issues in relation to this with their SMT.

### **PAVA ROLL OUT**

Due to the COVID 19 outbreak and the additional pressures we face HMPPS has suspended several initiatives including the roll out of PAVA. However, they have agreed with the POA recommendation that all staff who have been trained in the use of PAVA should be issued with it immediately. This has been communicated to Governors. Local committees are encouraged to liaise with their SMT to ensure all staff who are trained in the use of PAVA are issued with it.

### **STAFF WITH HEALTH CONCERNS**

It has been reported that some staff with underlying health conditions who wish to shield themselves at home for 12 weeks are being sent 'standard' letters informing them they need to return to work or face a period of unpaid leave. Any staff who have concerns should liaise with their local committee to ensure their case is dealt with individually and all health aspects are considered. It would help if you could provide medical evidence and include advice from your GP so all factors can be contemplated.

Those staff who receive a letter from the NHS should follow that advice and will receive full pay on special leave.

Pregnant staff are encouraged to ask for paid special leave and insist they remain at home quoting the Employment Rights **Act 1996** s99 and **Maternity** and Parental Leave etc **Regulations 1999** reg.

If any member of staff receives a phone call from an area HRBP enquiring as to when they will return to work because they are self-isolating, please ensure you make your local committee aware so we may take action to stop this practice. You are reminded that it is the responsibility of your line manager to contact you when you are absent. Please do not feel pressured or intimidated to return to work before it is safe for you to do so.

### **PRISON ESTATE EXPANDED TO PROTECT NHS FROM CORONAVIRUS RISK**

Work to expand the Prison Estate by installing the first of 500 temporary, single occupancy cells will begin this week, as part of the Government's unprecedented action to protect the public and NHS during the Coronavirus pandemic. The temporary accommodation is planned to be installed at HMP North Sea Camp, with Littlehey, Hollesley Bay, Highpoint, Moorland, Lindholme and Humber to follow. Only low risk cat C and D prisoners will be held in this temporary accommodation following a thorough risk assessment. The POA remain in consultation with HMPPS to finalise details.

### **PAY AWARD**

The Independent Pay Review Body is now in receipt of all the evidence both written and oral in relation to our pay award for 2019/20. Once their recommendations have been finalised and approved by Government, I will update you. Due to the present situation there are no indications when a pay award will be announced.

### **DEATHS IN SERVICE**

It is with great sadness that I must report to you the deaths of three of our work colleagues. Two OSG grades at HMP Pentonville, Mr. Bovil Peter and Mr. Patrick Beckford, and one Caterer at HMP Wymott, Mr. David Bentham. We wish the families and friends of our fallen colleagues our deepest sympathy at this time.

Finally, I just wanted to pay tribute to each and every one of you during this difficult period. The risks you take in order to maintain order and control, whilst protecting the public is one that will not go unnoticed.

Please continue to support each other and take no risks. If you need access to mental health support, please access the employee assistance programme. Do not suffer in silence.

The NEC are available around the clock and we will support you throughout these troubling times.

With respect and solidarity to you all I wish you and your families well.

For and on behalf of the NEC.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Fairhurst', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**MARK FAIRHURST**  
National Chair