



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

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Dear Colleagues

UPDATE GENERAL SECRETARY

The POA are putting out regular advice during this National Emergency of COVID-19. Our members are rightly anxious and at times frightened and that is a natural reaction. You have been identified as Key Workers and that means like all other Key Workers you are expected to attend work when you are fit and well. That is something that I support but at the same time I do not support presenteeism because when you are ill and turning up for work that does not assist anyone and could spread the virus. The messages from the Prime Minister will confuse some people about social distancing and remaining at home, along with instructions to not travel unnecessarily. Obviously, that does not apply to Key Workers such as yourselves because when you are fit and well you are expected to turn up for work. Workers such as you, Police Officers, Nurses, Doctors and all health workers including Cleaners, Firefighters, Shopworkers and all other Key Workers are doing a brave and at times a thankless task.

Behind the scenes the POA and all other Trade Unions affiliated to the TUC are working with their respective Employers and indeed Government Officials in a constructive manner. The Director General Phil Copple and the CEO Jo Farrar are in constant touch with the National Chairman Mark Fairhurst and myself. This is a time of National crisis in working together and looking for solutions. I make no apology for working in partnership with the Director General of HMPPS because not to do so and look for problems at every turn would not in my view keep our members safe or indeed those in our care. The POA in Scotland are doing exactly the same with their employer as is the same in Northern Ireland. I am also liaising with Special Hospitals in the NHS and our private sector providers, Sodexo, G4S, and Serco and having a constructive dialogue with them.

There is no blue- print for this and having been involved as a POA member for 30 years I personally have not come across anything so challenging in that duration. We need to all pull together and make agreements that probably we would never have entertained in normal times. I recognise that most POA members are true professionals and will do their very best to look after those in our care and indeed

look after each other. Difficult decisions will have to be made in the coming days, weeks and months but I am confident we will all rise to the challenge.

That is why I personally have offered last week in my spare time to go back to the landings as a volunteer even although I left the Prison Service in 2010. The reason I have done that is because I believe it is the right thing to do. You never forget how to be a Prison Officer and if I can assist by doing that then I am quite prepared to do so if the Prison Service give me the green light.

I would ask our members wherever you are to remain patient with the NEC and your respective employers. I know this is a difficult time for you and your families and there are genuine concerns surrounding Personal Protective Equipment, COVID-19 testing arrangements and genuine concerns about regimes. As stated previously the POA are dealing with those concerns and we have the ear of the Director General Phil Copple and other employers' senior officials. We all know this is not a game this has serious consequences if contingency plans are breached or some Prisons are over ambitious in what they think is safe to carry out. All of us need to remain calm and help each other in these testing times with different ways of working.

On a personal note just in relation to HMPPS and the Director General Phil Copple. In my view he has shown true leadership and at every opportunity picked up the phone late into the night to keep myself and the National Chairman informed. We do not always agree on every issue, but professional partnership working is imperative during this crisis. For those that use social media please refrain from abusive or insulting language. The POA will not always respond to social media questions because sometimes it is security sensitive. I know the majority of our members are professional and want to be seen in a professional light and use social media responsibly please help us to help you.

I intend to do a regular briefing on a weekly basis but please keep safe and look after yourselves and your families in these difficult times that no one has experienced before. Working constructively with employers, Government and each other will see us through this major challenge.

Yours Sincerely

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

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary