

## **Working together: HMPPS and POA Joint Statement on Progressing Medium Term Recovery**

The Government has recently shared its plans and approach for emergence from the Covid-19 lockdown in England. The Welsh Government has also published its plans for Wales. It is recognised that these do differ in a number of respects, with travel currently an example of this. HMPPS has written to all our recognised trade unions to formally start the consultation and engagement process in respect of what this will mean for our staff and how we manage our custodial estate.

At all points in the coming weeks, each stage will be discussed fully between HMPPS and the POA (and other recognised trade unions) in a good faith effort to agree the details before plans are progressed. Just as HMPPS and the POA worked in a collaborative approach in all the arrangements, considerations and safety assessments for lockdown, so this constructive approach will continue as we move to the next phase and successive phases.

There will be no immediate changes to the current prison regimes that are in place, but planning work for how HMPPS moves forward safely in the near future is now underway. HMPPS is developing the operational details of a medium term plan for the next 12 months. This work involves extensive consultation with the POA and our other recognised trade unions and engagement with other key stakeholders.

A **National Framework** mirroring the Government's wider approach for the UK has recently been published. Within this framework there will be levels or 'regime stages' reflecting the transmission risk, each with a corresponding range of activities which are assessed as safe to take place, subject to public health advice. Appropriate restrictions and safety measures will apply at each regime stage. This document provides a summary of how prisons will operate while Covid-19 remains a threat but where the most severe restrictions on prison regimes are no longer proportionate or sustainable, or where the threat can be mitigated via alternative approaches.

The overarching framework will be supported by more detailed instructions and guidance within a range of Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs), related to the activities and services that take place at each level. Nationally, the POA will be fully involved and consulted on the EDMs, as it has been on the National Framework. At a local level the necessary arrangements and sufficient facility time will be in place for POA trade union representatives to engage on local Covid plans and safe systems of work in support of the safe implementation of published EDMs.

HMPPS will maintain a data and evidence-based approach, informed by public health advice. There will not be target dates for the prison estate to start moving to less restricted regime stages, or for individual establishments to do so. These decisions will be based on an objective and rigorous assessment of the data and evidence about what is appropriate, in line with the Framework. Equally, returning to higher levels of restriction will take place if necessary, but not otherwise.

Over time more aspects of prison regimes will be reinstated, but we will only do this once it is safe and we have the necessary PPE and public health measures in place, including suitable testing plans and clinical oversight.

The following principles apply to the current context:

- We will plan carefully for what the easing of restrictions will mean in practice, tailored to local circumstances. Lives are at stake with Covid-19, so we will proceed with an

abundance of caution and our approach will be informed by public health advice, which will be shared with the POA and other recognised trade unions.

- Prisons are closed settings holding many vulnerable people and so inherently high-risk. The timing of changes may not mirror developments outside prisons because of the heightened risks. The easing of restrictions in the community will increase the risk of new incursions of the disease through new prisoners, staff and others, and we will need to respond accordingly.
- Where certain activities can resume – such as social visits or education – we should expect them to do so with considerable restrictions and adaptations (including reduced capacity) in the interests of safety. Progress will be slow and incremental, and restrictions may need to be re-imposed in the event of local outbreaks.
- Our plans will need to be flexible enough to accommodate the very different circumstances and situations of different prisons (the appropriate regime will be very different between a YCS establishment, a High-Security prison, a female Open prison and so on).
- We will need to continue the shielding of the most vulnerable prisoners and staff. We will need to respect the choice of some other prisoners to minimise their social contact.
- We will have to live with Covid-19 for a long time and must focus on making progress towards a ‘new normal’ rather than simply a return to the previous status quo. As time goes on and research tells us more about the virus, we will adapt our plans.
- We will need to continue to work collaboratively with partners in delivering these objectives. We will coordinate our medium-term plan for prisons with that for probation recovery, and work closely with CJS and other (particularly health) partners to align plans.
- We will engage staff of all grades as we develop the details of our medium-term plan and EDMs, and will carry out intensive consultation with our trade unions in this work.

Progress continues to be made on our compartmentalisation strategy and establishing separate units for different prisoner cohorts. These measures will remain in place whilst we safely progress. Some other key underpinnings of the approach are:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): sufficient PPE must be available. Easing regime restrictions will generally increase the amount of PPE required, for example for visits to the prison, so PPE stocks must be assessed as suitable before any changes take place and must remain sufficient for the activity to continue.
- Social distancing and hand-washing: wherever possible, the same social distancing and hand-washing principles must be maintained in prisons as in the community. However, the unique nature of the prison environment will not always allow for this to be practical, and prison level plans must identify where exceptions will be made, justify why the exception is proportionate and the additional mitigations that will be put in place to manage this.
- Testing and clinical observation: testing is already available for symptomatic staff, but to support capacity and maintain effective public health measures a greater testing capability will be needed – for example, testing and clinical oversight of new receptions and symptomatic prisoners, plus contact tracing where outbreaks occur.

HMPPS, with the support of the POA and other recognised trade unions, has in the past few weeks introduced a severely restricted regime with new safe operating procedures which have been highly effective in reducing social contact to keep staff, prisoners and the wider public safe.

Our aim remains the same as at the start of this emergency, which is to keep people safe. We will move forwards but only when and where we are confident it is safe and the circumstances locally mean we are ready to do so.

We recognise in this statement that critical to the success of medium term recovery from the Covid-19 emergency will be the continuation of the constructive joint working between HMPPS and the POA which has been so important to the achievements made so far.

Signed 22 June 2020.



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