



Notes from the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) Special Interest Group on Covid-19

Wednesday 11th November 2020, via video call

Attendance

Anne Fox, Clinks

Will Downs, Clinks

Peter Dawson, Prison Reform Trust (SIG co-sponsor)

Rod Clark, Prisoners Education Trust

Khatuna Tsintsadze, Zahid Mubarak Trust

Phil Maguire, Prison Radio Association (co-opted)

Paul Grainge, Recoop

Vicki Cardwell, Spark Inside (co-opted)

Tina Parker, Pact

Martin Blakebrough, Kaleidoscope

Tracy Wild, Langley House Trust

Richy Cunningham, Recovery Connections

Pippa Goodfellow, SCYJ (co-opted)

Simon Ruding, TiPP (co-opted)

Nina Champion, Criminal Justice Alliance (co-opted)

Nicky Park, St Giles

Emma Wells, Community Chaplaincy Association

Andy Keen-Downs, Pact (co-opted)

Linda Pattinson, User Voice (co-opted)

Helen Dyson, Nacro

Helen Carter, HMPPS

Chris Gunderson, HMPPS

Apologies

Alice Dawnay, Switchback (co-opted)

Peter Atherton, Community Led Initiatives

Chris Stacey, Unlock

Lisa Dando, Brighton Women's Centre

Laura Seebohm, Changing Lives

Nathan Dick, Revolving Doors Agency (co-opted)

Kate Paradine, Women in Prison (co-opted)

Dez Brown, Spark2Life

Dee Anand, Together

The management of prisons in the context of the national lockdown in England

Operational update on the approach from HMPPS

- The response to the first national lockdown in early 2020 was to minimise contact between people in prison in order to minimise the spread of infection. To do this, all prisons automatically went into a greatly restricted regime. Since then, we have developed a range of Covid-safe working practices. Therefore, the approach for the current national lockdown is to empower Governors to maintain activities in a safe way where possible.
- HMPPS Gold command chair a weekly feedback panel each Friday, attended by Public Health England (PHE). A traffic light system has been established to define the current status in each prison, and prisons will be defined as green, amber or red depending on live outbreaks in prisons, in the neighbouring community or where there are significant absences of staff.

Where prisons move to red, the emphasis on the outbreak control measures will still be to maintain a positive regime where possible.

Regimes under national lockdown in England

- The principle set out in national requirements is to retain as much of the regime as possible, though this will also depend on staff availability and managing Covid-19 outbreaks. In prisons an outbreak is defined where there are two or more apparently linked Covid cases on one site.
- Activities in prison will be run by establishing regime groups - where a small number of people in prison will do activities together to minimise contact with other residents. Single regime groups will then be able to access services, such as a workshop or gym session together. The intention is to minimise mixing across regime groups, though pragmatically this won't always be possible - as each regime group is likely to consist of people who need access to different things. Therefore, some people may be a part of two regime groups depending on their needs, though mixing will always be restricted as much as possible.
- Education provision is expected to be maintained during the period of national lockdown in England where it is safe to do so.
- The clearest change in regimes in the adult estate is that social visits are suspended. Face to face social visits will only be facilitated for compassionate purposes. Secure video calls are being maintained and will be maximised where possible and there is an explicit expectation that Governors will prioritise access to video calls.
- Many activities are open to a degree, and people will be able to attend PE, gyms, education, workshops etc. through their regime groups where it is safe to do so. Faith services and activities such as barbering, hair dressing and swap shops are largely suspended. Library services are suspended as a group activity, though they can be operated in some form if run in a Covid-19 safe way (e.g. a delivery book service).
- HMPPS are conducting an ongoing review of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), they recognise the increased importance of this in the run up to Christmas and are working to ensure Christmas ROTL is possible, although numbers will likely be greatly reduced.
- Offender behaviour programmes can continue to run if they were already running in a Covid-19 safe way prior to lockdown.
- There is a recognition that youth custody is very different, given the distinct risk profile and needs of young people. Reasonable time out of cell is paramount, visits are continuing and the regime should be maintained as much as possible. Separate guidance has gone out to Governors in the youth custody estate.

Testing, tracing and reverse cohorting

- HMPPS are increasing the number of sites where there routine testing is taking place. This is linked to the reverse cohorting processes. Subject to someone having two negative tests in the first week, they can now move from reverse cohorting units after seven days rather than the current 14 days, creating capacity in the system and reducing stress for those needing to isolate on entry to prison.
- A new Compartmentalisation Strategy has been established, including updated guidance on prisoner shielding requirements and testing. As more people in prison are opting to come out of shielding, we therefore need less space for shielding units.
- Chris Gunderson said that a new system of more accurate contact tracing is being implemented across the estate, which should limit the numbers of staff needing to isolate.

HMPPS are now identifying a band 5 Contact Tracing Lead in each prison, who will make enquires within 24 hours of a risk being identified and make specific recommendations to PHE of who needs to isolate.

- A member asked whether the increased risk of transmission in prison would mean that prison officers and service users are given priority access to any vaccine that becomes available. Chris Gunderson said that ideally people in prison and staff would be considered a priority group, further guidance is awaited at this stage.

Information and communication

- Chris Gunderson acknowledged the frustration and difficulty caused when voluntary organisations had received important operational information about the impacts of the national lockdown very late or through secondary sources. He explained this was due to an embargo as necessary processes in Parliament and within the department were completed.
- A member asked whether HMPPS anticipated improvements and relaxation in regimes after 2 December. Chris Gunderson said HMPPS were planning on that basis and that prisons would then revert back to the stage they were operating under prior to lockdown.
- HMPPS are very conscious that providers of services have questioned the flow of information. To manage the challenges in sharing timely information, HMPPS will make available, the status of each individual prison to give as close to a live picture as possible. This should help partner provider organisations monitor the situation and plan accordingly.
- HMPPS have developed an internal comms campaign for prison staff to encourage adherence to Covid-19 guidance and therefore reduce staff absences. As prison staff aren't always able to keep up with the high volume of information sent by the centre, the new band 5 Contact Tracing Lead will also be trained as local Covid-19 champion, to ensure education and information flows to staff. Covid-19 champions will be appointed in November and will receive training on their role.
- A member suggested the Contact Tracing Lead communicates the latest instructions to organisations that work with the prison. Chris Gunderson welcomed the idea that consideration be given to the role being expanded to communicate more widely with partners.

Winter regime review and Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs)

- Chris Gunderson thanked the group for their feedback to inform the review of EDMs as part of the winter regime review. His team has set out some high-level objectives to open up the regime more under stage three over the winter. Although this work is currently on hold, after 2 December HMPPS hope to make appropriate amends to EDMs to ensure more can be done under stage three.
- The group fed back that EDMs don't necessarily correlate with some services delivered by voluntary organisations, for example coaching and mentoring services can be interpreted as being relevant to different EDMs in different prisons. Chris Gunderson said EDMs provided a useful but occasionally formulaic process which didn't capture everything. HMPPS are reticent to make too many additional EDMs but are also wary of shoehorning things where they might not fit. As part of the winter regime review, the intention is to create information around good practice and options of what can be done alongside and in addition to existing EDMs.

Additional issues arising from questions and feedback

- A member asked whether there was an equalities lead in each prison. Chris Gunderson said a recent equalities impact assessment recognised the impact of Covid-19 restrictions in prisons was more severe for those with protected characteristics, so there is now an equalities work stream at the centre and equalities impact assessments now have to be signed off by each Prison Group Director for every new procedure. It was acknowledged there remains a risk that equalities work becomes an add-on to people's jobs.
- A member asked whether the government intended to resurrect the early release scheme that was initially set up in response to the first wave. Chris Gunderson said the early release scheme wasn't successful with the number of people released very low. Due to court backlogs, the current prison population is at its lowest for many years and therefore there is not the same degree of pressure to create capacity in the estate through early release. As court backlogs begin to clear, there will be a renewed pressure on the population and conversations around early release may be resurrected.
- A member asked whether an evaluation had taken place of secure video calls, as people in prison had reported issues with their quality. HMPPS are aware of issues around video calls in relation to logistics, security and quality and that learning has fed into ongoing monitoring and evaluation, which itself informs any decisions to expand the services.
- A member asked if HMPPS were looking to develop more peer support and peer mentor services in prisons, as part of plans to promote wellbeing through and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Chris Gunderson said peer mentoring is an ongoing focus and its importance is recognised.

The management of probation services in the context of the national lockdown in England

Operational update on the approach from HMPPS

- The principles underpinning the approach being taken by probation services remain unchanged: prioritising public protection and risk management, as well as delivery of advice to courts in all regions. They are also maximising delivery of broader offender management and interventions as far as possible, while responding to restrictions and following PHE/W advice.
- Probation Services have a flexible system of Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) which set out how they operate all key aspects of probation during the pandemic. These include 'red', 'amber' and 'green' sections which allow Regional Probation Directors and CRC CEOs to take decisions about what level of probation delivery can be achieved in their areas. This approach has been endorsed by HMI Probation and continues to be used despite national restrictions. It is possible that this will require RPDs/CEOs to deliver 'red' offender management in some places, but this is not necessarily the case. The decisions about the level of service which can be provided are based primarily on the number of available probation staff, as well as space available and other local factors.
- Liverpool probation area have put measures in place in light of the announcement regarding mass testing; their delivery status will be regularly reviewed in case mass testing affects staff availability.
- Some probation staff continue to self-isolate at home, but the vast majority can continue working remotely and so the impact of staffing absence on probation isn't as significant as the impact on prisons.
- Probation services are gradually increasing face to face contact with service users, where it is safe to do so, offering increasing numbers of appointments in offices for higher risk and more vulnerable service users. The vast majority of offices are now open or partially open,

with more opening each week. “Doorstep” visits, where service users are spoken to in a socially distanced way by probation staff, are still taking place for some service users.

- The reopening of further Approved Premises has continued subject to a thorough business readiness assessment process and sign off by Public Health England. All APs which were previously closed due to Covid-19 have now been reopened.
- CRCs are gradually increasing the level of delivery of socially distanced unpaid work, with steady week on week progression.
- As accredited programmes usually take place in groups, these have been disrupted during lockdown and by ongoing social distancing measures. HMPPS have prioritised programmes aimed at child safeguarding and people with convictions for sex, domestic abuse and violent crimes. Rehabilitation work has taken place in other formats during this time, for example, with more one-to-one delivery, work in smaller groups and remote delivery via video conferencing. HMPPS have developed an alternative delivery model and prioritisation framework for Accredited Programmes, which is now in place.

Feedback and questions

- A member asked about whether in light of national lockdown, HMPPS were looking again at the challenges people leaving prison face in accessing services in the community. The group have previously highlighted issues around the discharge grant, access to internet-enabled phones with sufficient data packages to access online and remote services and access to services for people released from prison to a community in lockdown.
 - Helen Carter said HMPPS were in a position where it could learn from the experiences earlier in the year and put plans and resource in place to manage these issues. During this period there would still be face-to-face contact with prison leavers and contact on day of release. There is a work stream set up under gold command for winter planning in the context of Covid-19 and EU exit, to ensure the probation service has the resources it needs. Testing is taking place in some prisons and probation are working with prisons to manage cases of those being release who are positive for Covid, symptomatic or awaiting test results.
 - Helen Carter said she would clarify the current provision of mobile phones to prison leavers. A member stressed the importance of phones being internet enabled with sufficient data packages where possible, due to the fact many services now operate online.
 - The group reiterated these concerns- citing the fact that essential safety nets in the community such as food banks, are very stretched as the economic impact of the pandemic forces an ever-greater number of people in the community into crisis. This greater demand is likely to impact how prison leavers can access essential services.
- A member of the group said that there needed to be clarity on the status of people that, due to Covid-19, have not been able to complete their set number of unpaid work hours that was mandated as part of their sentence.
 - Helen Carter said HMPPS are aware of the issue, and don't want to see service users negatively impacted by something out of their control. There are discussions ongoing and work taking place to resolve this.
- A member asked about the provision of face masks for prison leavers. Voluntary organisations have been made aware of service users refused access to buses for not wearing a face mask, as they hadn't been given one on release.
 - Helen Carter said there was a clear instruction that everyone on release from prison should be instructed of rules around social distancing and face coverings and be

provided with a face covering. If organisations are aware of cases where this is not happening they are encouraged to raise it with HMPPS.

ENDS.