



**Notes from the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) Special Interest Group on
Covid-19
Wednesday 24th February 2021, via video call**

Attendees:

Anne Fox, Clinks (chair)	Tracy Eadie, Recoop (co-opted)
Will Downs, Clinks (notes)	Linda Patterson, User Voice (co-opted)
Khatuna Tsintsadze, Zahid Mubarak Trust	Alice Dawnay, Switchback (co-opted)
Helen Dyson, Nacro	Nina Champion, Criminal Justice Alliance (co-opted)
Francesca Cooney, Prisoners Education Trust	Neil Grutchfield, Synergy Theatre (co-opted)
Andy Keen-Downs, Pact (co-opted)	Millie Harris, Alliance for Youth Justice (for Pippa Goodfellow- Co-opted)
Phil Maguire, Prison Radio Association (co-opted)	Mark Day, Prison Reform Trust (for Peter Dawson)
Simon Ruding, TiPP (co-opted)	Melissa Berry, Include (co-opted)
Nathan Dick, Revolving Doors Agency (co-opted)	Ruth Boyd, HMPPS
Helen Kelly, Changing Lives (for Laura Seebohm)	Chris Gunderson, HMPPS

Apologies:

Martin Blakebrough, Kaleidoscope
Tracy Wild, Langley House Trust
Dez Brown, Spark2Life
Dee Anand, Together for Mental Wellbeing
Peter Dawson, Prison Reform Trust
Lisa Dando, Brighton Women's Centre
Laura Seebohm, Changing Lives
Paul Grainge, Recoop
Peter Atherton, Community Led Initiatives
Emma Wells, Community Chaplaincy Association
Kate Paradine, Women in Prison (co-opted)
Pippa Goodfellow, Alliance for Youth Justice (co-opted)
Vicki Cardwell, Spark Inside (co-opted)

Update on prison regimes

- Chris Gunderson, Covid-19 Command, HMPPS gave an update on regimes in prison. All prisons in the adult estate remain at stage 4 of the [National framework for prison regimes and services](#). There are a set of processes in place before a prison in the adult estate can progress to stage 3:

- Ministers must first give national approval for prisons to progress from stage 4, and for individual prisons to apply to move to stage 3. This is expected to happen in the coming weeks.
 - Each Friday a heat map panel run by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and Public Health England (PHE) meets to consider clinical data, including staffing positions, outbreak status, prevalence in the community, vaccination data, testing etc.
 - From this meeting a longlist will be produced of prisons who are able to progress to stage three. These prisons will receive a notification that they are on the progression list on the Friday.
 - The prison group director and the prison governor will then make a decision as to whether they feel able to progress.
 - The following Wednesday, HMPPS then hears applications from prisons and makes the decision about whether that prison can progress.
- HMPPS want to see progression take place, but with a large number of outbreaks continuing across the estate, progression may take some time.
 - Even when prisons are approved to progress to stage 3, regimes will continue to be heavily restricted. Existing restrictions in the community means that social visits are not currently possible for a prison in stage 3. Indoor gyms in prisons are unlikely to reopen as there is a reputational consideration around opening gyms in prisons when they are not open in the community. There are currently structured physical education activities happening outdoors and some form of expansion of that under stage 3 would be very welcome.
 - Social visits are being cautiously reintroduced to care homes, under a lot of restrictions and mitigations which provides an interesting model that could potentially be applied to social visits into prisons.
 - HMPPS is also starting to design future regime models for the post-Covid world. They will harness learning from their management of Covid-19 to run regimes in a safer way in the future, for example by retaining smaller regime groups.
 - A paper drafted for the Prisons Operational Management Committee (POMC), proposing the procurement of additional tech, has been approved. Small welfare budgets are now available for sites to provide extra support and expand PIN credit at sites where in-cell telephony is not yet installed. A gold briefing to governors has been sent out on this. Chris Gunderson said he would provide more details once an announcement was made.
 - The youth estate has remained at stage 3 during the current lockdown, though it has been a restricted version of stage 3. Education has been delivered in a blended way, mixing some face-to-face services and with remote delivery. The youth estate has a different risk dynamic and children have different needs. The first aim of progression for the youth estate is to deliver a full and positive stage 3 model.

Questions and discussion on prison regimes

Will progression to stage 3 enable education staff to visit prisoners on the wings?

- The ambition for stage 3 is for more education provision and potentially some provision of face-to-face delivery, where local risk assessments are in place that can ensure that it is delivered safely.
- Local governors have the discretion to take different approaches according to circumstance however. Through the crisis some governors have welcomed people onto the wings to drop off resources, or conduct some delivery through the cell door, but others have not allowed for this. There will be local differentials on how education is provided under stage 3.

What is the current coverage of in-cell telephony and portable phones? People have reported being able to access only one phone tutorial a week from education providers which isn't sufficient for most learners, especially those with additional needs.

- HMPPS is conducting an ongoing expansion programme of in-cell telephony. *Chris Gunderson to come back with a fuller response on the progress of the in-cell telephony programme.*

People in prison have been locked in their cells for up to 23.5 hours a day and can't get out for outdoor activity. The removal of access to the gym therefore has a much greater impact on the mental and physical health than for people in the community. Will the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HMPPS make the case to the government for why prison gyms should be opened?

- HMPPS is aware of the benefits of physical activity, and both prisoners and governors have expressed their desire to see physical activity return. The barriers are both due to reputational risk and clinical risk considerations. HMPPS, alongside PHE, have established programmes of Covid-safe structured physical activity in previous lockdowns and they are working with ministers to establish the same in the current conditions.
- Anne Fox offered to pull together voluntary organisations specialising in sports and recreation provision in prisons to offer further support and advice to HMPPS on this issue. *Secretariat to follow up with Chris Gunderson on the offer of a meeting focussed on physical activity provision.*

Since September HMIP has published 20 reports, and seven prisons out of 20 had no strategic work around equalities, meaning important outcomes related to equalities aren't monitored. When designing a new normal, will HMPPS mandate that prisons resume strategic work on equalities?

- HMPPS conducted a thematic review on disproportionate impacts on people with protected characteristics which showed there has been an impact. There are plans in place to incorporate considerations of equality from the very start of the future regime planning work. HMPPS will respond to the issues highlighted by HMIP and is communicating with governors on these points. Chris Gunderson suggested a future RR3 meeting could focus on the future regime work. *Secretariat to follow up with Chris Gunderson on the offer of a meeting focussed on future regime planning.*

Places of worship have remained open in the community, what are the plans for reopening worship in prisons?

- A differential position in prisons has been maintained from that in the community, on the basis of PHE advice that communal worship presented additional risk in prison due to

mixing. Individual worship and pastoral support has been maintained where possible. Restricted forms of communal worship will return at stage 3.

- Anne Fox suggested that the RR3 convene specialist voluntary organisations with prison chaplaincy's and faith services, to feed into HMPPS' planning for ensuring people are able to access their faith during Ramadan. *Secretariat to liaise with HMPPS officials to arrange a meeting to help develop plans for faith provision during Ramadan.*

Will there be a route map published by HMPPS that communicates how prisons will be expected to progress through stages and reopen regimes? Could a route map relate this planned progress to milestones in the lifting of restrictions in the community?

- Chris Gunderson said he was open to this idea. HMPPS can't be wedded to dates, but could potentially publish information on route for progression and mechanics and processes of that. *Chris Gunderson to follow up on suggestion of a progression route map being published.*

Many people have not received responses to their written submissions to the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI). Have HMPPS had a response from JCVI?

- *Chris Gunderson to come back to the group with information about the JCVI's response.*
- The vaccination programme for prisoners is proceeding. It is a health-led programme so out of the immediate control of HMPPS. There are differential approaches being taken to vaccinations for people working in some specified professions. Nationally, prison staff do not have the same priority status as care workers and will continue to be vaccinated in line with the wider community.
- An attendee said the recent decision to vaccinate people with learning disabilities was based on the heightened risk of living in a residential setting where social distancing is difficult to maintain. In clinical terms, there seems little difference between this and people living in a prison.

Where do people living and working in the youth custody estate fall in the prioritisation of vaccinations?

- The same rules apply for staff in the youth custodial estate as the adult estate. *Chris Gunderson to come back to the group with information regarding prioritisation of children in the youth estate.*

How is HMPPS ensuring that it is disseminating information on regime progression to people living in prison to keep people informed and help people manage anxiety?

- Plans for progression will be sent to governors in the next few days. Some governors have maintained forums and focus groups and found various ways to keep the prisoner population engaged. There is however differential approaches across the estate, and a limit to what HMPPS can do centrally to ensure individual prisons are communicating well with the people in their care. HMPPS will continue to reiterate the importance of communication with prisoners.

Discussion on plans to maximise take-up of vaccinations in prisons

- Ruth Boyd, Stakeholder Engagement lead at HMPPS, provided an update of the work of HMPPS to maximise the uptake of vaccinations in prisons. JCVI determines prioritisation of vaccinations and NHS England (NHSE) deliver the programme. HMPPS is however coming across certain cohorts of people who might be more hesitant about accepting the vaccine. The cohorts vary widely, and concerns vary widely. HMPPS is working with public health partners to understand which groups might be particularly hesitant and why. HMPPS also wants to work with stakeholders to understand how they can best maximise the uptake of vaccinations for people who may be hesitant, and what information and messages partners need to support this.
- Attendees provided feedback on possible routes of communications, how best to reach people who may be hesitant, and what organisations need to support take up.

Routes for communications

- People in the criminal justice system are most likely to trust other people in the criminal justice system or those that have been in contact with it. The vast provision of peer support delivered through voluntary organisations will be a vital route through which productive discussions can be had. HMPPS should engage with voluntary organisations providing peer support and peer led activity, such as St Giles, the Samaritans listener programme, Recoop buddy programme, Shannon Trust, Revolving Doors Agency, the Prison Reform Trust Prisoner Policy Network, User Voice and others.
- National Prison Radio is respected by people in prison. During Covid-19 there has been a significant increase in people regularly tuning in. Phil Copple, Director General of Prisons responds each week to questions put to him by prisoners. They have information around regimes and Covid-19 on heavy rotation. They can continue to put information out but need accurate and timely information from HMPPS to do so.
- Prison newspapers such as Inside Time and Converse are widely read. The Mailbag feature of Inside Time could be a way in which HMPPS and NHSE respond directly to questions raised by people in prison. The parole board and prisons service already do this to some degree.
- HMPPS could explore ways in which people could access information when conducting video calls.
- Families can have a significant influence on people in prison. Family providers can help disseminate information and messaging to families via the Prisoners Families Helpline, social media accounts, and visitor centres. The family and friends request show on national prison radio could also be a productive route for this. Organisations simply need cleared, accurate information to be able to adapt and deliver in the way they best see fit.
- HMPPS should engage with Independent Monitoring Boards.

Reaching specific groups who may be hesitant

- Misinformation materialises differently across faiths. Different religious groups have been targeted by people spreading misinformation, such as information that suggests vaccine contains stem cells, or alcohol, or animal products etc. Prison chaplaincies and faith leaders will be a vital route through which to get information out. The chaplaincy broadcasts on prison radio are also an opportunity to do this. The interfaith network website has very good information from faith leaders of all the major religious communities.
- There has been some specific concern amongst women about the impact of the vaccine on fertility. An attendee recommended that HMPPS engage with specialist organisations such as Birth Companions to discuss ways to address this.
- There is some concern amongst people with hepatitis, HIV and other conditions over the impact of vaccinations on them. Addiction recovery groups and substance misuse organisations may also benefit from some tailored messaging to address this.
- HMPPS should think about how they can best reach young people in prison and segment their communications accordingly. Recent research conducted across nine prisons, showed a high degree of hesitancy amongst black men in prison. HMPPS should consider how to segment their communications to reach black men in prison.

Additional considerations

- An attendee requested that HMPPS work with NHSE&I to provide data to the sector that disaggregates the reasons why people have not taken the vaccine.
- Production of easy to read information is important to account for neurodiversity within a prison. HMPPS should engage with Keyring to discuss other ways in which they can take into account neurodiversity in their communications.
- HMPPS should show flexibility around vaccinations during Ramadan, as people may want to take the vaccine but see it as breaking fast. HMPPS needs to have plans in place on how it manages refusals on these grounds. *Ruth Boyd to come back to the group with a position on how HMPPS will manage people who refuse vaccinations due to adherence to Ramadan.*
- Information must be provided in different languages.

What voluntary organisations need from HMPPS

- Voluntary organisations enjoy a degree of trust amongst people in prison and people in prison are more likely to be responsive when it is the voluntary sector sharing the messages. The sector needs accurate information and messaging to be shared with them in a clear, timely and transparent way from HMPPS. Voluntary organisations need to be trusted to take that information and to use it in the best way they see fit for their service users, including shaping new content such as blogs, videos, leaflets etc that will have the most impact.
- HMPPS offered to share with the group the current resources they have and invited organisations to provide feedback. *Secretariat to collate feedback from the group on existing HMPPS resources.*