

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

**Wednesday 23rd June 2021 via Zoom**

**Attendees**

Jess Mullen, Clinks (chair)	Neil Grutchfield, Synergy
Noori Piperdy, Clinks (notes)	Paul Grainge, Recoop
Alasdair Jackson, Recycling Lives	Alex Hewson, Prison Reform Trust
Andy Keen-Downs, Pact	Rachel Tynan, Unlock
Emma Wells, Community Chaplaincy Association	Heather Johnson, Langley House Trust
Khatuna Tsintsadze, Zahid Mubarek Trust	Vicki Markiewicz, Change Grow Live
Martin Blakebrough, Kaleidoscope	David Liddemore, HMPPS
Matina Marougka, Together for Mental Wellbeing	Martin Mukassa, HMPPS
Mel Berry, Include	Ruth Boyd, HMPPS

**Apologies**

Alice Dawnay, Switchback	Peter Atherton, Community Led Initiatives
Laura Seebohm, Changing Lives	Phil Maguire, Prison Radio Association
Linda Patterson, User Voice	Pippa Goodfellow, Alliance for Youth Justice
Lisa Dando, Brighton Women's Centre	Tina Parker, Pact
Nina Champion, Criminal Justice Alliance	Milosz Bruski, HMPPS

**Opening remarks**

- Jess Mullen (Chair) opened the meeting. She explained that due to Anne Fox being on compassionate leave, she will be chairing the RR3 Covid-19 Special Interest Group (SIG) until further notice.
- Jess also highlighted that Noori Piperdy, new Policy Officer at Clinks, will be taking over as secretariat for the main RR3 group and this SIG. Noori is to be the main point of contact going forward.

**HMPPS Update on regime recovery**

*Note: all facts and figures accurate on the day of the meeting but may have subsequently changed*

- For context, David Liddemore (HMPPS) explained that HMPPS has moved to a twice weekly reporting cycle and as of Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, the prison population is currently at 78,194. There are currently three prison outbreaks. There has been a slight increase of symptomatic prisoners of around 20 from the week before. Staff related absences were also slightly increased from the week before.
- There has been no Covid-19 related deaths reported in either staff since March, or the prison population since April.

- In terms of regime progression, every site is delivering at least a Stage 3 regime. Since last month when HMPPS opened the Stage 2 gateway, there are nine sites delivering a Stage 2 regime. Information on the stage of each prison is updated on the [prison finder pages of gov.uk](#). There are a few sites that HMPPS is actively considering progressing to stage 2, but the Delta variant provides growing concern. HMPPS is working with Public Health England (PHE) to progress when appropriate.
- Following the Prime Minister's announcement on the 14<sup>th</sup> June, HMPPS will not be asking to progress any sites to a Stage 1 gateway until 19<sup>th</sup> July at the earliest. HMPPS is not reviewing risk assessments but have issued a gold brief to ensure sites remain cautious and bearing in mind important safety precautions. If and when the community does open up, due to the high-risk nature of prisons, HMPPS is not bound to follow by opening up its sites and will continue to work with PHE on the safest way to do so, once there is a significant percentage of prisoners and staff vaccinated. HMPPS is not encouraging sites to move backwards due to the Delta variant, instead it is carefully progressing where it is safe to do so.
- As the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has opened up eligibility to all adults to receive a vaccine, HMPPS is working to accelerate this process for the prison population and will be delivering mass vaccinations at some sites.
- There have been two phases of testing pilots carried out. Phase 1 consisted of visitors (over the age of 11) being invited to take a Covid-19 test before visiting a site. This had an extremely low uptake of only 4% of visitors accepting a pre-visit test. However, Phase 2, has had a much more positive response. This is where visitors, if tested negative, have been allowed to have physical contact with prisoners. The sites participating are updated on [gov.uk](#). As of 22nd June, at the pilot sites, 345 tests have been offered to prisoners, and 81% had been accepted. Of visitors, 346 had been offered, and 88% of people had accepted. There have been 21 negative results prior to travel which were also provided. The midpoint review of this pilot was due to be held on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> June, to which HMPPS will provide an update at the next meeting. The next phase will look at how to enhance visits further, for example, by providing refreshments.

## Discussion

- Attendee's asked about monitoring vaccine uptake in prisons, amongst staff and how the mass vaccination process will be carried out. David explained that though HMPPS does its best to monitor both, vaccination status data is owned by health and subject to strict GDPR measures therefore it can only capture data that is volunteered by staff and prisoners. In terms of mass vaccinations, the resourcing around staff and physical space will affect what sites will partake in this process. David will ask the relevant team to share information.
- An attendee asked that, due to the efficacy of one dose of the vaccine and the Delta variant, how HMPPS will be facilitating prisoners receiving their second dose, and whether they will be accelerating this process in prisons or how they will be ensuring they receive the second dose through-the-gate. David explained that HMPPS is working with healthcare officials on this matter and ensuring that prisoners as a bare minimum receive their first dose.

- An attendee asked if there was any insight as to why some visitors were rejecting the offer of testing before visiting at the pilot sites. David explained that there are a range of reasons, the team are recording the data and can provide more in-depth detail at the next meeting. Preliminary findings suggest some are weary of testing perhaps due to previous experience, and some are concerned that it may stop them from visiting altogether.
- An attendee asked as to why, from their experience of currently delivering services in prisons, only some sites are asking about external staff's vaccination statuses. In addition, they asked about the education being delivered to prisoners regarding the vaccine due to overhearing some conversations amongst prisoners. In terms of asking about vaccination statuses amongst external staff, David was unsure as to why some sites hadn't asked and will follow up internally. In terms of educating prisoners, David expressed he is aware of myths in prisons and the communications team have produced material for staff and prisoners. Ruth Boyd (HMPPS) has committed to sharing the material when available.
- An attendee observed that many of the prisons in Wales are at Stage 2, apart from HMP Swansea and wondered if there was any learning behind this decision. David explained that there has been a great amount of progress for sites in Wales, and to his knowledge, there wasn't any particular reason as to why they haven't progressed. He added that he expects this progress across the estate in due course.
- An attendee asked about the mental health of prisoners being released due to the impact of the pandemic. David explained that mental health remains a concern in prisons and the HQ safety team is monitoring and addressing this, including the rise of self-harm. He suggested inviting a member of that team to a future meeting.
- An attendee asked about how concerned officials and ministers were about the short to medium term pressure on prison places, and the ability of the prison service to be able to maintain those appropriate safeguards as courts starts to progress cases. David explained that this was a great concern, and there is a lot of work undergoing as to how this will be managed across the whole criminal justice system. HMPPS will continue to monitor and update where possible.
- An attendee asked about the short to medium term - recovery, and medium to long term - reform strategy and if there is any written information that can be provided as to pathway between the two. David explained that there is no written information on this yet as it is still ongoing. HMPPS is looking at future regime design that is likely to see some Covid-19 controls remaining in place after 19<sup>th</sup> July for some time, or processes that can be quickly reinstated if the risk increases again. HMPPS is currently curating information regarding assurance processes and documentation to support progression, a new stage one 'safe operating procedure', and a model of stage one regime delivery.
- One attendee asked how long the process will be for prisons to move from Stage 2 to Stage 1. David explained there is no clear answer as of yet and it will be different for each prison depending on the particular circumstance locally.

## Closing remarks

- Jess explained that at the next meeting we plan to invite Kate Davies, NHS England and Eamon O'Moore from Public Health England to provide a further update on the vaccination roll out and possible concerns around the impact of the Delta variant.
- Jess explained that we plan to keep the frequency of the meetings as monthly, and dependent on how the pandemic progresses, we may take an August break.
- Jess thanked officials from HMPPS and voluntary sector attendees for attending and brought the meeting to a close.