



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

Wednesday 14th October 2020, via video call

Attendance

Anne Fox, Clinks
Will Downs, Clinks
Tom Aldridge, St Giles
Helen Berresford, Nacro
Peter Dawson, Prison Reform Trust (SIG co-sponsor)
Rod Clark, Prisoners Education Trust
Khatuna Tsintsadze, Zahid Mubarak Trust
Nathan Dick, Revolving Doors Agency (co-opted)
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
Chris Gunderson, HMPPS

Apologies

Alice Dawnay, Switchback (co-opted)
Peter Atherton, Community Led Initiatives
Pippa Goodfellow, SCYJ (co-opted)
Chris Stacey, Unlock
Lisa Dando, Brighton Women's Centre
Laura Seebohm, Changing Lives
Simon Ruding, TiPP
Nina Champion, Criminal Justice Alliance
Dee Anand, Together
Nicky Park, St Giles
Emma Wells, Community Chaplaincy Association
Andy Keen-Downs, Pact (co-opted)
Kate Paradine, Women in Prison (co-opted)
Dez Brown, Spark2Life

Winter regime planning

Context and update

- The increase in community transmission of Covid-19 will likely impact the further reopening of regimes as set out in the *National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services*. It is now highly unlikely that any prison will be able to progress past stage three over the winter period.
- Stages three and four of the model were originally conceived in a different context. Stage four was designed as establishing regime essentials at a time of critically reduced staffing, and stage three set out tentative steps towards a limited regime. The learning this year however shows that the mental and physical health of service users can be negatively impacted by spending protracted time in cells.
- With this situation in mind, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is conducting a review of the Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) for stages three and four, to ensure prison regimes over winter are fit for purpose, while managing the risk of Covid-19 and the likelihood of high staff absences.

Education and coaching services

- A member of the group said that their organisation had worked hard to try to reintroduce their coaching service to prisons in an adapted, one-to-one model, but that some prisons

aren't clear whether this is sanctioned under the existing regime. Part of the problem is that the service doesn't fit neatly into a single EDM - for example it can be seen by some as a wellbeing and mental health intervention, and by others as an educational service.

- Chris Gunderson said that under the plans for stage two, governors would have been given greater autonomy on these issues. As it is unlikely any prison will progress to stage two over winter, HMPPS is keen to explore how they can empower individual prisons to implement positive activities under stage three where it is safe to do so, even if that service doesn't directly fit into an EDM.
- A member of the group warned that education providers will be very disappointed that prisons are unlikely to progress to stage two, as face-to-face provision is effectively ruled out under stage three. They urged HMPPS to prioritise education provision in this review and think creatively about how they can maximise education provision under stage three even if it is still not possible to get people in classrooms.
- Chris Gunderson confirmed that education is one of the priority elements of the review. He said there are aspirations for wider provisions but this will be dependent on a number of factors.
- A member of the group urged that the review should prioritise what can be done for people coming up to parole hearings, to enable them to present activity in front of the parole board.

Equalities

- A member of the group urged HMPPS to reintroduce work on equalities as part of this latest review, as there is real concern over how equalities work has been dropped during the crisis, and that disparities for people with protected characteristics had not been monitored.
- Anne Fox said that one of the impacts of restrictions had been on the inability now of voluntary sector personnel to identify and raise concerns about people they work with (for example through Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) processes) which have previously been a considerable factor in the flow of such information. The next stage of winter planning should consider this.

Technology and family contact

- A member of the group referred to provision of access to video calls at HMP Swaleside as a positive example of an excellent service being implemented in a difficult context. They asked whether there was scope for HMPPS, as part of their review, to give governors greater freedom and encouragement to utilise every IT asset they have, from landline phones in offices, to tablet devices usually reserved for compassionate visits. The revised EDMs should relax the normal risk assessment rules in relation to access to IT, as during the winter months, it is highly likely that this will be the principle form of contact people in prison will have with family and voluntary sector support.
- Chris Gunderson said HMPPS has implemented many things during Covid-19 that have been innovative solutions delivered very rapidly in response to the pandemic. He said he would pass the feedback on to his team.
- A member of the group said they have found prisons reluctant to introduce new measures, for example some prisons are not putting voluntary service providers' numbers on PIN phones. Where positive changes have been achieved in other prisons, this review should explore how other prisons can be encouraged to take them up.

Resettlement

- A member of the group asked how HMPPS intended to take into account the probation reform programme, resettlement planning, Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) and Enhanced Through The Gate Provision as part of this work.
- Chris Gunderson said this was a challenge, as Covid-19 has impacted delivery around resettlement, including sentence planning in prison and preparation for people attending the parole board. He said resettlement is within the scope of the regime review, and they welcome suggestions from partners on how they can reintroduce or improve resettlement services, especially in the context of not being able to run face-to-face contact.
- A member of the group said that when the first lockdown happened and through the gate staff were pulled out of prisons, the level of access to people in prison varied significantly. With the winter regime approaching, HMPPS should explore what flexibility there could be to ensure that through the gate teams can access service users. They suggested that even where face-to-face contact isn't possible, staff could be allowed into prisons, to use internal mail and phones etc.

Reverse cohorting and testing

- A member of the group raised concerns about the welfare and likelihood of significant deterioration of mental health of people who are routinely forced to socially isolate in prisons. For example, some people who regularly need to travel to hospital for healthcare are placed back in the reverse cohorting system on their return to prison, meaning they are in effect continuously isolated.
- Chris Gunderson said that as part of the reverse cohorting strategy, it is expected that regular trips to hospitals is considered a controlled activity, and therefore there is no requirement for them to be placed in reverse cohorting on their return. Chris said they can push that guidance again to make sure prisons are clear of the rules. HMPPS does not think isolation and cellular confinement are the answer, and prisons should try to maintain a purposeful regime wherever it is safe to do so.
- A member of the group asked whether HMPPS planned to test service users in the same way they do staff. Chris Gunderson said there is a testing pilot that is ongoing in a small number of prisons, as to how HMPPS establish a model of testing. Roll-out of testing for service users will depend on the number of kits available. Priority will be given to those coming into reverse cohorting units.

Face covering strategy

- Chris Gunderson said that HMPPS has developed a face covering strategy. The strategy will make face masks available for all staff across prisons and probation. There are a number of reasons for this strategy:
 - To recognise that the main transmission risk into prisons is HMPPS staff
 - To do everything possible to limit transmission without limiting movement
 - To reflect the societal shift where face coverings are now normalised in indoor spaces.
- The face coverings strategy in prisons has three tiers - national, local and individual - the combined impact of which will be that face masks are worn by staff across the estate:
 - The national tier sets out where face masks should be mandated across the prison estate based on national risk assessments

- The local tier takes into account heightened risk in a particular setting - where local risk assessments can mandate the use of face masks even if it has not been mandated nationally
- The individual tier allows an individual working in prison access to a face mask, even when there is no national or local requirement to do so.
- Under the strategy, service users will have access to face coverings, while staff will have access to higher specification face masks. There is an important distinction between face coverings and face masks. Face coverings are what most of the public wear - essentially any material that covers the nose and mouth. Face masks however are classified as PPE. If you have come into contact with someone who tests positive for Covid-19, wearing a face covering at the time isn't considered by public health as a mitigating factor, and the individual will still have to isolate. A surgical grade face mask however is considered to be a mitigating factor when considering your proximity to someone who has tested positive, meaning you will not necessarily have to isolate.
- HMPPS hope that by using face masks amongst staff, they will significantly reduce the number of staff at any one prison who need to isolate due to track and trace. This would prevent a handful of cases in a single prison leading to a large proportion of staff needing to isolate.
- Chris Gunderson said that the strategy for face coverings in probation services mirrors that in prison, and follows the same three tiered model. All staff in the probation sector should have access to sufficient face masks, and all service users will have access to face coverings.
- Face masks won't be provided for people coming into prison for social visits, as in line with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) guidance, HMPPS doesn't want to unnecessarily add to the pressures on national stocks of face masks. Other controls are in place around social distancing and hand cleaning that can mitigate risk.
- Chris Gunderson said voluntary sector staff that are not directly employed by HMPPS are not covered by their strategies. HMPPS will honour the risk assessments and policies of an individual's employer.
- Anne Fox said that lots of voluntary sector services are delivered by volunteers, who don't have an employment contract with anyone, and HMPPS should consider the rules they must adhere to. She also said that voluntary organisations will need very clear information on the face coverings strategy, to know what they need and what is allowed and to ensure they are purchasing the right kind of covering. Consideration needs to be given to the cost of this to voluntary organisations.

Voluntary sector feedback

- Chris Gunderson invited members of the RR3 to suggest ideas on how establishments could maximise regimes under the pressures they are facing. He suggested voluntary organisations could provide single-page specifications of scaled-back versions of how something could be delivered, detailing what elements those services would rely on - whether that's access to IT and offices etc. He said he would speak to his team about the best way to capture ideas, exploring whether they can produce a template for ideas.
- Chris Gunderson said he is more than happy to share all the information around the review of EDMs with the group to enable them to feedback. He said he would be happy to share all the EDMs and for the group to feedback on each EDM where an element of service can be reintroduced, or where more flexibility could be introduced.

- Anne Fox welcomed this invitation and reiterated the group's willingness to support. She said the RR3 were able to provide feedback rapidly, but the group would also welcome a clear indication of timescales for the programme and how best to feedback.
- The group recommends that once the EDMs are reviewed, they should be published clearly and transparently on the gov.uk website, as well as information on what stage each prison is at. We acknowledge the complexity of communicating things internally across such a large organisation at a time of such complexity, but also urge that improving external communication should be part of the winter regime review.
- Chris Gunderson acknowledged these challenges. He said he would share the EDMs and face covering strategy with the group. HMPPS will think about how to improve the flow of information, though as the situation changes on a daily basis it is difficult to ensure it is kept up to date.

ENDS.