**Security at Social Visits – COVID-19**

**Introduction**

This guide has been produced to assist Governors and staff in delivering effective security during social visits when moving from regime level 4 to regime level 3. This document support the Social Visits EDM and Social Visits SOP.

**Desired outcomes**

These desired outcomes must be considered and recorded as part of the visits readiness assessment.

* Establishments must ensure that their searching processes, interim visits seating arrangements and staff supervision levels and staff placement in the visits room, remove the risk of conveyancing through visits.
* Establishments must ensure that the escape risk of a visits walk out is removed, particularly as interim arrangements will include the option in certain circumstances of wearing of face coverings for both visitors and prisoners. Governors have the discretion to require prisoners to wear distinctive clothing to aid staff as set out in PSI 15/2011.
* Establishments must ensure that the searching process is not compromised because of the PHE advice on social distancing and sites must work to process map and remove any potential obstacles around this.
* Establishments must be alive to the potential emotional response from visitors and prisoners after being apart for such a long time.   They should sensitively manage potential issues of compliance with sensible judgement, whilst achieving order and control in the visits setting.

**Searching (visitors)**

Visitor searching as set out PSI 07/2016 Searching of the Person remains in place. This provides that social visitors may be subject to a Level A rub-down searches and arrangements for visitor searching is set out in local security strategies (LSS). The level of searching set out in your LSS must still be followed, using the appropriate PPE set out in the Social Visits SOP. Visitors will be asked to remove their face covering and staff must carry out a visual and finger tip check that nothing is concealed within the covering. Searching staff should be mindful that face coverings are not something that we have had to search previously and for those visitors who are intent on breaking the law, face coverings may provide a new method of conveyance, particularly for small items such as SIM cards.

Establishments should consider maximising the use of technology and security aids, including metal detector poles and prison dogs. X-ray Bodyscanners **must not** be used on visitors under any circumstances.

As part of the readiness assessments establishments must examine the physical layout of the visitor’s entry search and ensure that the flow enables social distancing wherever possible. Consideration must also be given to how and when staff can cleanse, change and dispose properly of PPE in between searches.

**Searching (Prisoners)**

Arrangements and levels of searches for prisoners before and after visits must be set out in the LSS and are still to be followed. In line with PSI 07/2016 prisoners must still receive the same level of searching following a visit as set out in your LSS. Appropriate PPE must be worn in line with the Social Visits SOP.

If an X-ray bodyscanner is available, their use should be considered in line with the X-ray Bodyscanners Policy Framework.

The Social Visits SOP includes the arrangements in place for the use of passive dogs.

**Supervision and staffing**

The number of supervising staff should be commensurate in order to deter visits from being used to further criminality, and in particularly, as a conveyancing route.

Staff should be positioned in visible areas to act as a deterrent. Sites might want to consider providing guidance to staff specifying which areas that they can move around the visits hall whilst maintaining social distancing in line with the EDM. Governors may want to consider increased CCTV monitoring, where possible. Staff should model social distancing at all times to ensure compliance for themselves and others. Where screens or barriers have been put in place staff need to adjust and account for any physical barriers that may hinder observation in the visits area. Considering should be given to the type of screens used, such as Perspex and whether staffing needs to be increased.

**Face coverings**

The Social Visits SOP provides when face coverings must be used. Further to this:

* Consideration must be given to always being able to identify your prisoners during the visit, particularly if prisoners are wearing face coverings which are the same as visitors;
* Consideration must be given to identify visitors and prisoners at the end of visits before visitors leave to minimise the risk of escape; and
* Consideration must be given to ensure prisoners have disposed of their face covering and searched before going back into the establishment to minimise the risk of it being used as a method of conveyance.

In line with Government guidance, face coverings are must be worn by everyone but children below 11 years old and those in the exemption group.

**Identification**

As set out in PSI 15/2011 all visitors to prisons, other than accompanied children under the age of 16 must be required to prove their identity at the gate. As provided in the SOP, visitors are not permitted to visit a prison whilst their home community area is within a defined as a local Covid-18 lockdown area. Visitors must therefore provide proof of address during the ID check and be advised of this requirement when booking their visit.

As set out in the EDM, establishments must develop a safe method for identifying visitors. If on arrival a visitor is wearing a face covering, visitors must be asked to pull down their face covering to adequately identify them.

In line with the Visits EDM, all visitors must be from the same household unless they are parents who live apart and form social bubble. If visitors are accompanied by a child, the adult visitors must confirm the child is from the same address as at least one of them.

**Additional considerations**

In addition to the factors set out in the EDM, prisons should take into account the following considerations when determining their ability to maintain order and control within their maximum determined number of visits:

* Risk of disorder – this can be mitigated somewhat by effective communication prior to a visit taking place (with both prisoners and visitors) in order to inform them of the changes to their experience and manage expectations;
* Risk of disturbance at particular points of the visitor entry process, such as the Visitor Centre if refusal search processes and face covering compliance and consider the appropriate response if there is a disturbance.
* The likely increased pressure on vulnerable people to convey items via visits due to not being able to pay off debts during lockdown, consideration should be given to additional support provided in Visitors Centre, such as posters, to act as a deterrent;
* The likely increased intent from organised crime groups to re-establish conveyance routes;
* The possibility that limited use of PIN phones or concerns over being listened to, might result in the reintroduction of visits being used to share more sensitive information (verbally or written) to continue criminality; and
* The likelihood that the first visits sessions will test new processes to assess ease for conveyance. Therefore, being confident and getting security measures right on initial visits is important to deter future criminal activity.
* Consideration to be given on the impact of throwovers and whether there may be an increased likelihood of throwovers following a visit.

If you have any queries on this guidance, please contact [SOCT.Procedures@justice.gov.uk](mailto:SOCT.Procedures@justice.gov.uk).