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**HMPPS guidance on conducting one to one interviews during COVID-19**

**Introduction:**

As COVID-19 cases reduce, prisons are reintroducing elements of regime from July 2020. A suite of Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) are being issued which will provide establishments/secure settings with guidance to stand up each suspended element of regime. Establishments will use EDMs to develop Local Operating Procedures (LOP) on each regime component. These will outline temporary procedures that must be followed to deliver each element of regime during the period of COVID controls. After the pandemic has officially been declared over, establishments will review the pre-COVID procedures to ensure they continue to be both effective and safe.

Two of the first regime elements to be stood back up will reintroduce workload requiring staff to facilitate one-to-one interviews with prisoners. These areas (“Offender Behaviour Programmes” including one to one sessions and “Offender Management” including key work and psychologist interviews) are both covered by EDMs that are being introduced in the first wave during July 2020. The EDMs will outline the mandated actions that establishments must follow when standing up each regime element, this document does not replicate that content or aim but should be read in conjunction with the EDM as well as the relevant SOP that must be adhered to. This document provides additional guidance on safe interviewing. This document has been produced in response to requests for additional guidance both from prisons and from agencies needing to reintroduce their staff into prisons to undertake these interviews.

In addition to the information included in this document, establishments can utilise HM Government’s COVID Workplace Risk Assessment to assess rooms and areas used for interviewing. This provides an overview of the hierarchy of measures and actions to provide a COVID secure environment.

 

**About this document:**

This document contains a series of tables that introduce key considerations when undertaking a one-to-one interview during COVID-19 control measures. The tables are split into three key areas; overarching principles, COVID-19 specific considerations and security considerations. Information provided within each section gives high level guidance rather than specific detail. This guidance is intended to provide ideas and inform decisions on what would work best locally at each establishment, local operating procedures should be developed based on this information in collaboration with local Union committees, as well as further guidance in the EDMs. For example, this guidance may be applicable to key-working/psychology sessions, Children and Young People Mental Health interviews or to adjudications, among other areas.

Please note that this guidance also applies to Young Offender Institutions as specific points have been added to show where practice in these establishments may vary from the adult estate, as well as to Secure Training Centres: where application may require interpretation where the legislative framework or operating model is substantially different from a prison.

**Overarching principles: Interviewing during COVID-19**

The following are drawn from Public Health England (PHE) and HMPPS guidance on all activity during COVID-19 and as such are relevant to interviews.

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| Area | Recommendation |
| **Necessity** | **This document assumes that the interview is essential and must proceed**  This document does not consider whether an interview should proceed, it presumes that the necessity of the interview has been established. As a general principle prisons are strongly advised to undertake interviews **only when essential** whilst the COVID-19 controls remain in place. |
| **Methodology** | **If face-to-face interview is not possible, alternative interview methodologies should be considered**  Face to face interview is considered to be the most desirable form of communication in many scenarios. However, where this is not essential, prisons must consider remote alternatives. These may include use of a video link, phone or digital facility where the facility exists. Where no such alternative exists, the face-to-face interview should be planned. |
| **Cross-site working** | **Cross-site work should be avoided, where possible.**  However, this may not always be possible as some of the HMPPS specialist resources are often shared between establishments. It is recognised that many service providers need to continue their work and this includes regular travelling between different sites. This applies to some health and social care services and specialist health services or essential shared national resources such as psychology, among others. |
| **OBP sessions** | **OBPs will run to a framework during COVID**  Sessions will be between 30 and 90 minutes with a break built in and sessions will run three times per week. Sessions will be delivered in either small groups or 1 to 1. Where break in a group session is deemed necessary, staff should ensure that social distancing measures are not compromised during this time. |
| **Contact tracing** | **Contact tracing requirements must be followed**  Under the new HMPPS Contact Tracing policy introduced in June 2020, staff undertaking an interview with a prisoner face to face needs to declare that contact to enable COVID-19 testing of the prisoner, in the event that the staff member becomes symptomatic. If a prisoner becomes symptomatic/positive, the member of staff will not automatically need to isolate in this eventuality as this is dependent on the duration and proximity of the contact. The HMPPS Contact Tracing policy must be followed and staff undertaking one-to-one interviews need to be aware of its contents. |

**COVID-19 specific Considerations**

The following information is drawn from PHE and H&S guidance on COVID-19 controls generally

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| Area | Recommendation |
| **Cohorting** | **Take into account the prisoner’s cohorting status**  Prior to conducting any 1:1 interview during ongoing COVID-19 controls the prisoner’s cohorting status must be taken into consideration. Every prison operates a cohorting model as part of COVID controls and this strategy should be made available to staff undertaking 1:1 interviews. Cohorting splits the establishment prisoner population into four areas/regimes:     1. The mainstream population 2. Reverse Cohorting Unit – for newly received prisoners (first 14 days after arrival) 3. Protective Isolation Unit – for symptomatic prisoners (minimum 7 days after diagnosis) 4. Shielding Unit – for those at most risk of contracting COVID (ongoing, for duration of COVID controls)   A prisoner’s cohorting status impacts on how/when we complete the interview. Prisoners who are confirmed **symptomatic** or with a **positive** test result should not have face-to-face contact for interviews. Any interviews/assessments that have to be done whilst a prisoner remains symptomatic must be done remotely, however we advise prisons to postpone these assessments wherever possible until prisoners are recovered and more able to engage. It is therefore recommended that where an interview is required for an assessment or report, that staff contact the commissioning authority to notify them where a prisoner due to be interviewed has been diagnosed with COVID-19 symptoms. This should not be done on the basis of a presentation of symptoms; confirmed diagnosis is required from a healthcare practitioner.  Prisoners in all other cohorts can be interviewed however prisons must ensure that the interview does not create a transmission risk. Prisoners should be interviewed on their own unit wherever possible as one of the purposes of cohorting is to minimise inter-area movement and contact. The room chosen should be appropriate to minimise risk (see room selection section). Prisoners on **reverse cohorting** units and **shielding** units are assumed to be free from the virus unless they begin to present with symptoms, therefore PPE is not required for an interview (unless social distancing cannot be maintained – see social distancing section).  Whilst we appreciate movement between units and areas is inevitable, staff undertaking interviews are advised to take reasonable steps to minimise contact with prisoners from different cohorts. For example, key-work allocation should be per wing rather across different units. Also, we cannot leave 14 days between interviews but staff are advised to group interviews together where possible so that they spend a period in each area and do not continually move between them. |
| **Social Distancing** | **Social distancing must be maintained**  On 23 June HM Government announced changes in the community in regards to social distancing. With effect from 4 July social distancing in England is reducing from two to one metre “plus”, provided there is effective mitigation in place (e.g. sufficient hand hygiene, face coverings and other controls). However, prisons are recognised by Public Health England (PHE) as a high risk for COVID outbreaks and as such HMPPS is retaining the requirement for two metre social distancing at this point. Therefore all interviews must be facilitated in a way that ensures two-metre social distancing is maintained throughout. |
| **Rules on contact** | **Contact tracing advice should be followed**  As stated above, social distancing must be maintained throughout the interview wherever possible. If for any reason social distancing cannot be maintained, staff must wear PPE as per the Safe Operating Procedure (SOP) issued by Health and Safety colleagues. In June HM Government issued new guidance on contact tracing to identify those persons who may be at heightened risk of catching COVID following contact with someone who subsequently became symptomatic. HMPPS introduced guidance on contact tracing based on Government advice.  HMPPS policy states that as long as PPE has been worn, an individual does not need to isolate if they have been in direct or proximity contact (defined below) with someone who became symptomatic. However if PPE has not been worn, people need to isolate if:   1. They have had “**direct contact**” with a COVID case for a period of 1 minute or longer within 1 metre; defined as face to face contact including being coughed on, conversation, skin on skin contact or travel in the same vehicle, or 2. They have had **“proximity contact”** with a COVID case for a period of 15 minutes or more uninterrupted within 1- 2 metres; defined as face to face contact including being coughed on, conversation, skin on skin contact or travel in the same vehicle   Individuals need to isolate for 14 days if they have had defined levels of contact (inclusive of a 1:1 interview) and not worn PPE. |
| **Cleaning & hand hygiene** | **Cleaning and hand hygiene should be promoted at all times**  The room where the interview takes place should be cleaned before and after the meeting. All contact surfaces and hand contact areas should be cleaned/disinfected and staff should ensure they have washed their hands and encourage prisoners to do so. Where security concerns regarding the use of hand sanitizer can be managed and prisoner’s use appropriately supervised, this should be made available for purposes of maintaining hand hygiene during the meeting. Staff should avoid passing documents where possible. However, some interviews may require shared documentation or materials (e.g IQ tests). The use of hand sanitizer in the interview may be required for these aspects. Also, staff are advised to ensure that the room selected for the interview is in the best condition for the purpose before it commences. Further guidance on cleaning and hand hygiene is provided in the relevant Safe Operating Procedure (SOP). |
| **PPE** | Only rooms where social distancing is possible should be used for this activity. As stated above, wherever social distancing is not deemed to provide sufficient control,  3PPE can be worn in line with the SOP on this subject. Provision of PPE is a requirement on an employer, therefore HMPPS will provide PPE for directly employed staff. Those staff attending the prison on behalf of a third sector organisation should wear PPE wherever it is a requirement of their employer’s policy, even if this may mean they are wearing PPE at times and in situations where HMPPS staff are not wearing PPE. The most up-to-date SOP has to be consulted on the specific details of PPE use. |
| **Duration** | **Staff are advised to minimise the length of an interview**  Whilst it is vital that interviews are long enough to fulfil their purpose and it is therefore impossible to impose a time restriction on interviews, PHE recommend that interactions between people are kept to the shortest duration possible in order to minimise any risks of transmission between them. Staff undertaking interviews that require longer contact time should build in breaks so that prisoners and staff can wash hands and remain hydrated and should keep the interview to the shortest possible duration. |
| **Miscellaneous** | **Staff should be aware of the following effective practice**  As much as possible rooms should be designated as interview spaces. Wall coverings should be kept to a minimum to prevent opportunities for the virus to be transmitted via hard surfaces. Staff and prisoners should not share pens or other materials and staff should minimise the times where they pass an item to a prisoner. If a prisoner is required to write comments or sign a document, they should be provided with a pen for this purpose that has not been used by another person. The prisoner should then be allowed to keep the pen or it should be disposed of. Whilst we recognise limitations on space, prisons should ensure that interview spaces are as close as possible to landings so that movement is minimised. Spaces on units should be used for interviews rather than changing location. |

**Security considerations**

The Directorate of Security, Order and Counter-Terrorism (SOCT) has provided guidance on the security considerations when preparing to undertake a 1:1 interview. This information is provided for information only and is designed to enable staff to effectively manage risks whilst undertaking this activity. Its inclusion does not indicate that there is a heightened risk of incidents whilst undertaking 1:1 interviews during COVID or that the practice is less safe than equivalent activity at other times.

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| Area | Recommendation | |
| **Location** | | **Staff should choose a secure location**  A suitable location should be selected as part of Risk Assessment process before the prisoner is collected. This can be conducted as part of the COVID Risk Assessment (attached in the introduction). Social distancing must be maintained at all times therefore staff should choose a location that is big enough to facilitate this. Though we appreciate the physical fabric can be inhibitive, staff should ensure the room is ventilated and clean. Interviews must not be conducted in occupied or vacant cells.  From a security perspective, staff should consider the layout of the room and items available to a prisoner (see ‘room control’ section). Staff should choose a room that is discrete where possible and be considerate to how other prisoners may perceive the actions of an individual entering an interview with staff. Staff must ensure that prior to commencing any interview they have informed the residential staff whey they are and which prisoner they have with them as well as carry a radio where possible. They should also inform the staff on the unit of the purpose of their visit. Staff should ask staff with knowledge of the prisoner to share any risk information in relation to them, such as their demeanour that day and known triggers. Having completed the interview, staff must share any new information via an Intelligence Report (IR) and by briefing staff verbally, or feeding back into the child or young person’s formulation. |
| **Room assessment** | | **Staff should make a visual check of the room and remove any obvious risks**  In addition to the relevant existing Risks Assessments and SSOWs as well as COVID controls mentioned above, staff should visually inspect a room and remove any obvious risk items from the area the prisoner will occupy prior to his/her arrival. Staff should consider the messaging and information they need to share and the impact this may have on the prisoner, staff should consider whether there is any risk of the prisoner reacting badly to this information and plan tactics to manage any negative reaction. Additional staff support should be considered, especially following relevant intelligence regarding potential negative reaction, but in a way that does not breach the social distancing requirements.  Staff should apply the principles of **defensive positioning** and choose a seat for themselves that is closest to the exit. Staff should then ensure that there is a physical barrier between themselves and the prisoner such as a desk or piece of furniture. Where no natural barrier exists, staff should create one by placing other furniture or items to interrupt a prisoner route to them in an emergency. Staff should ensure their route from their seated position to the exit is not obstructed. The prisoner seat should be furthest into a room with the maximum distance possible between them and the member of staff.  Staff should consider the items in close proximity to the prisoner seat and remove any items that could pose a risk such as a heavy item, potential weapon or an item that could be lifted or thrown. Without making the room appear austere, staff must remove any obvious risks prior to the interview. Staff should take time whilst doing the assessment to identify their closest exit, route to it and closest alarm point. A room with an alarm point should be chosen wherever possible. |

**Closing remarks**

The purpose of this document is to provide general information on 1:1 interviewing during COVID-19. It draws on PHE and H&S guidance as well as effective practice shared by SOCT. This document should be read in conjunction with the EDMs on areas of work including 1:1 interviews which will be published in June or July 2020. This document is intended to provide high level general information, if more specific information is required please contact the COVID-19 prison regime management team on [COVID-19.regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk](mailto:COVID-19.regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk)