Dear Governor/Director,

Like the community, with infection levels falling and vaccinations continuing we are increasingly focussed on recovery across the custodial estate. Last week the PM confirmed the move to Step 2 of the community roadmap to go ahead as planned today. Alongside this note, you have received further detail on the impacts of this on prison regimes

Custodial recovery is underway, and our ambition remains to continue to progress through the stages of the National Framework over this period. Though we will be guided by the community roadmap, our approach will be tailored to the specific vulnerabilities and needs of prisons and the youth secure estate alongside relevant public health advice.

**This briefing provides further information and resources on the custodial recovery programme, our priorities for the recovery period and expectations for regime progression.**

**Custodial Recovery Programme**

The measures we’ve introduced over the past year have been necessary to protect our colleagues and those in our care and have undoubtedly saved lives. However, we know those same interventions to reduce contact continue to impact on the wellbeing of staff, prisoners and children, and our ability to deliver the interventions to support rehabilitation and progression. Therefore, the focus of the programme is on recovering from the impacts of the pandemic on those who live and work in our establishments, supporting and enabling the safe expansion of regimes and services and building back safer, fairer and better.

The custodial recovery programme, overseen by the Chief Operating Officer, has been established to support operational delivery over the recovery period. The ‘recovery period’ is now underway and will last until we reach Stage 1 of the National Framework, where Covid controls will no longer be a significant constraint on delivery. Alongside this note, you have received a separate briefing on the progress and plans for the design of Stage 1 regimes as part of the Future Regime Design (FRD) project.

During the recovery period, we aim to support Governors to safely expand regimes, re-introduce key areas of activity to support staff, prisoners and children and begin to address the backlog of activity created by Covid restrictions. In doing so, we will be guided by our recovery priorities:

* **Staff confidence, capability and wellbeing:** Re-building and promoting the confidence and capability of our workforce after a year of unprecedented strain and fatigue. A key part of this will be supporting positive relationships between staff and prisoners.
* **Prisoner and child wellbeing**: Supporting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our prisoners, increasing their meaningful and constructive time in and out of cell, access to family contact and keywork.
* **Sentence progression:** Restarting activity to allow prisoners and children to prepare for release and demonstrate progression in their sentence. This will also include supporting their release through the provision of finance, accommodation and employment support to reduce reoffending.
* **Building the ‘pathway to reform’:** Continuing to learn lessons from Covid-19 and utilise these to incorporate new ways of working and service delivery consistent with reform in order to lay foundations for the wider future reform programme and address deficits in the estate such as staff training and annual leave.

Continued progression through the National Framework regime stages remains our ambition, however, we know we will retain some vulnerability to Covid throughout 2021. The journey through recovery is unlikely to be linear and we need to remain resilient and responsive to future Covid scenarios. Over this period, we will need to seize the opportunities to improve regimes where we can but remain resilient to outbreaks at individual establishments and rises in overall risk from Covid nationally. We must be ready to re-impose restrictions if necessary, in response to these risks. Further information on the priorities and work of the custodial recovery programme can be found in the attached Slides (these have also been attached to the cover email).



**Regime progression over the recovery period**

Following the opening of the National Gateway, increasing numbers of adult prisons are now transitioning to Stage 3 and the delivery of EDMs. At Stage 2, the EDMs remain the baseline but Governors will have the flexibility to go further and deliver wider activity and expanded volume where possible in balance with the delivery of essential backlog activity, consistent with the direction of regime design at Stage 1. In the coming weeks, we will be issuing further guidance to support the planning and prioritisation of local recovery activity. This will include further detail on the overarching recovery priorities to support local regime planning and guidance to support Governors in balancing the ambition for regime delivery against the resourcing required to maintain Covid controls and address key backlogs.

Consistent with the National Framework, Gateway decisions will be required from Ministers before any prisons can move to Stage 2 or Stage 1. Conditions for progression at the national level will be based on several indicators. This will include national infection rates, vaccine rollout, uptake and effectiveness, and emergence of any Variants of Concern (VOC). Beyond these indicators, movement to Stage 1 is dependent on the relaxation of Covid control measures in the community such that delivery in the custodial estate is less restrained. A movement to Stage 1 doesn’t mean all recovery activity is complete: addressing backlogs and broader recovery activity may need to continue into Stage 1.

Throughout this period and as regimes progress, appropriate Covid-19 controls are essential to ensure the safety of staff and prisoners and prevent further outbreaks should there be a rise in infection rates. This includes continued adherence to infection prevention measures, enablement for the NHS vaccination programme and support to staff and prisoner testing programmes.

**Next Steps**

We will continue to engage with you over April on our recovery priorities and planning and welcome further contributions. The further guidance referenced above is planned to be issued at the end of April.