Dear Directors and Governors

We wrote to you on 5 March 2021 about our plans to design the model for stage 1 of the National Framework for COVID recovery. This was initially under the Structured On Wing Activity (SOWA) project but is now called the Future Regime Design Project (FRD) within the Operational Reform Programme and the Prison Reform Portfolio Programme. It encompasses the whole prison regime and is not defined by delivery of residential services only. FRD will design the framework model for stage 1 in time for the first prisons to reach that stage.

The framework for stage 1 is a gateway to the Prison Reform that follows and further development of the regime and how we work in prisons. The framework itself will set high level regime parameters for prisons to achieve in their local regime models at stage 1, this is needed at pace to ensure it is available for the first prisons to reach that point, so it should naturally be ambitious but limited in scope. This framework will ensure that prisons are operating in a state that provides a foundation for enabling further regime reform.

Whilst our aim feels limiting until we are clear what comes next The Prison Reform Portfolio will deliver more systemic change on an estate wide basis. Work is at an early stage and focused on engaging and listening to the front line, diagnosing what is needed to bring about successful reforms. Work has commenced on some key ‘enablers’ to future regime reform. We will develop a new purposeful activity measure focused on ensuring prisoners experience “time well spent”, delivering quality rather than just quantity of activity. Alongside this we will develop a wider definition of purposeful activity on the basis that purpose is defined by the impact on an individual, rather than the nature of the activity and as such a wider range of formal and informal, individual and group activities can be considered purposeful. In fact productive time spent in our out of formal activities, in cell, on wing or off wing, should be our goal. We hope to tailor the delivery of activity to individual needs being more person centred in our approach both giving staff and prisoners more opportunities to active participants in the regime creating the opportunity for progression.

We have spoken to many of you about the framework and the reform programme during regional events and via the Governors Reference Group meetings. We have also attended many of your SMT events to engage in your local planning. We have held initial meetings with recognised Trade Unions, HMIP and our senior leaders. We have met with third sector providers and representatives from each regime policy area. Work has commenced on the development of a new performance measure and new definition of purposeful activity. These will not be completed within the time available for the stage 1 framework to be developed, they will therefore be completed during the longer term reform work that follows. The work has been endorsed by Prison Recovery Board, Prison Reform Board and Prisons Operational Management Committee (POMC).

**This briefing provides an overview of work to date for your information. It also includes a request for governors/directors to consider sharing their local engagement with prisoners and staff on Future Regimes as well as any Stage 1 planning. This is to inform this work as early as possible.**

**Learnings so far**

Our engagement with frontline colleagues has covered the project plan and products for stage 1 but has also introduced and challenged our aspirations for the longer term reform of prison regimes. The themes of the feedback are summarised below as well as separately in the attachment at the end of the document:

**On the stage 1 model:**

* At stage 1 we must tailor regime expectations to cohorts of prisoners and categories of prisons.
* That the model could be an over-arching framework of expectations that must achieve the right balance between central oversight and local ownership.
* That this should be designed collaboratively, with leaders on the frontline

**On future regime aspirations:**

* That there is broad support for a new performance measure and definition of purposeful activity
* That prisons need the ability to localise the purposeful activity offer
* That there is an opportunity to do something meaningful, different and truly reformative
* That we must be realistic and balance expectations on backlog recovery with reform aspiration.
* That there is significant local innovation and planning already underway and we must reflect this in central planning.
* We have a lot of pre-existing models, innovations and ideas that we should revisit
* We should collate these ideas into a solid evidence base before proceeding on long term reform.

**Next steps – further engagement**

We are very keen to engage as widely as possible to help create the evidence base for future regime reform that colleagues have rightly asked for but there are undoubtedly gaps in our knowledge. We are therefore keen to include two additional areas of information to our evidence base.

Firstly, we are keen to give a voice to prisoners and prison staff of all grades and roles in future regime planning. In doing so we do not want to undermine or inhibit your local engagement work.

We are therefore asking you to share the output from any staff and prisoner surveys or forums you have held locally on any aspect of post-COVID regime. Please email any content that you are able to share to Chris.Gunderson@justice.gov.uk

To supplement this, we are planning on asking further specific questions of the staff and prisoner groups through targeted engagement, e.g. surveys. This is also intended to be supported by Trade Unions through Joint Statements. In doing so we will also ask for support from each prison involved bearing in mind the pressures you are under. We hope that between the request to share local content and targeted national surveys we will gain contributions from frontline staff and prisoners.

Secondly, we are asking establishments to share any documents containing your early plans or proposals for post-COVID regimes. This is voluntary and we are not looking to exert central control over these localised ideas. However, we recognise that there is significant innovation and reform already planned at local level and we are keen to consider this as part of the process to set the parameters for stage 1, to share good practice and to inform the longer term reform programme. Again, please provide any high-level proposals or ideas to Chris Gunderson at the address provided. We will not comment back on any ideas unless asked to do so but will consider these in the context of central planning.

**Next steps – Design of stage 1**

Whilst the progression needs to be cautious, the immediate priority is to produce a working framework for stage 1 in time for establishments reaching that point. As explained in the National Framework, Stage 1 is when “Regimes are operating without requirements for social distancing or PPE use” This is particularly important as we want to ensure that the framework for Stage 2, being produced in April, is aligned to what follows in Stage 1. We will therefore be inviting Governors, Directors and stakeholders to participate in a series of design workshops, designated to different types of establishments. This will include at least different workshops for Reception/Training/Resettlement/Female/Long Term/Open estate. The purpose of these workshops is to design the Stage 1 framework and the foundation of the regime on which Governors can build. The design of Stage 1 is a collaborative process and we want to ensure co-design. Further information on the design workshops will be issued in the near future.

Once an outline design has been created, we will engage in testing of this to inform the resource and operating model that will be required.

May I take this opportunity to thank all colleagues for their active engagement and participation to date in the work to design Stage 1 and Future Regime Design. We welcome further contributions to help shape the work and therefore urge establishments to provide summaries of engagement activity and any planning documentation you are able to share, even at this early stage as set out above.

Ed Cornmell

Deputy Director Prison Reform

Gold Commander

March 2021

Guide to attachments

Short and initial summary of learning from engagement events with governors/PGDs(ongoing)

Summary of project plan for design of stage 1

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