During COVID, HMPPS created a National Framework for Prison Recovery which outlined how prisons would run their regimes during COVID restrictions.

There are five stages that prisons can move through as they respond to COVID, with the majority of prisons operating at a stage four during the most significant period of national restrictions and progressing as outbreaks reduce. Stage one prisons are at the stage in their recovery where they can deliver a meaningful, decent, safe and full regime.

We know that one size does not fit all so although there will be national expectations and guidance for the type or function of a prison, governors will make their own local plans for a stage one regime using a newly created Regime Review Tool. The Regime Review Tool will include risk assessments based on local prison data which is routinely captured, for example around safety, as well as our learning from COVID around themes such as mixing and movement. This will enable governors to build a regime which best suits their prison’s needs and offers the best outcomes for reducing reoffending.

While COVID restrictions posed significant challenges to prisons, it also taught us a lot about what we can do to make our prisons safer for staff and prisoners and provide regimes that support prisoners in progressing through their sentence. A stage one regime will need to find the right balance between safety and increasing activity from current COVID levels to what we would consider a reasonable standard of regime.

Staff, stakeholders, partners and prisoners have provided clear and consistent feedback that some changes that were introduced because of COVID have been beneficial to running a safer prison, particularly in the male estate. We want to use what we have learnt in the last 18 months and what we already knew works well to begin reforming our regimes.

This includes reviewing group size, movement around the prison, how activities are run and how prisoners spend their time on their wing. These are all elements which could look different in a stage one regime.

We will need to keep some COVID prevention measures in place during stage one because prisons are high-risk environments. Health advice is that we will not be able to lift our restrictions in the same way as the community. However, a stage one regime will see a much fuller regime than we have been able to run and provide greater local decision making for governors.

Stage one regime will provide us with a safe foundation as we move out of COVID restrictions. We can then use this foundation to make larger changes as part of longer-term Prison Reform.