**19.01.2022 Plan B Restrictions Announcement in the Prison Context**

The Prime Minister this afternoon issued an announcement that Plan B community restrictions will be lifted on 26th January. While this is positive news and we are seeing some progress in prisons, the implications of this must be considered in the context of our unique environment.

In custody we are still experiencing the highest recorded number of outbreaks to date. We have experienced significant numbers of staff absent from work throughout this period, though our staffing position has improved recently. This has been a disruptive period for prisons and we must now proceed with caution and in a controlled way to not undo the good work that has been achieved since the emergence of Omicron to protect all the people who live, work in and visit prisons.

As impacts have varied locally between establishments, we expect differences in how quickly prisons will be able to progress. However, due to the more confined and vulnerable context of prisons, our expectation has always been that there will be a delay behind the progress of the community. Therefore, at this time prisons will remain at the baseline of Stage 3, accepting that some are having to operate at Stage 4. We will communicate any change to this as we further assess the risk and ability for sites to progress.

Our principal goal is to keep people safe and for the time being, prisons must continue to rely on the wearing of FRSM face masks, and other task-relevant PPE, in all prisons. Mandatory testing for all staff should continue with daily staff testing to start imminently, as must the isolation of staff and prisoners who are positive, in line with current guidance.

We should continue to work closely with Public Health colleagues and NHS partners through multi-agency Outbreak Control Teams (OCTs). Governors/Directors must ensure that they continue to engage with OCT meetings keeping them fully updated on the situation at each establishment and the balance of the risks that we manage. As we see a relaxation of controls in the community, we may see an increased risk and challenge to the legitimate application of controls in our prisons, therefore a focus on stability, order and control is important at this time.

Vaccination remains the best protection against COVID-19 and prisons must continue to prioritise vaccinations. This includes supporting staff with time to receive their vaccination in the community and promoting the need to record their vaccination status on SOP. Prisons should further continue to prioritise prisoner vaccination clinics with over 70% of prisoners over age 50 having been fully vaccinated this is making a big difference to keep those most vulnerable as safe as possible.

We are keeping the situation under review and will communicate any further changes to restrictions in prisons as soon as this is possible. We will continue to support you throughout this important recovery period. Any queries should be directed to COVID19Ops&Guidance1@justice.gov.uk