

Prison Governors Association

Representing: The Prison Governors of the United Kingdom since 1987



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Bulletin 771

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Dear Colleagues,

COVID-19

In an attempt to keep you up to date with all developments around COVID-19 the PGA will send you regular bulletins on the subject. We hope to have answers to most of your queries which we will escalate if unable to answer ourselves. The engagement with HMPPS and in particular Employee Relations has been excellent and we are grateful for their tolerance in fielding our myriad of questions.

Facility Time

As most of you will know, we have three National Officers each with 50% facility time and 50% project time. We are in unprecedented times, so Phil Cople has decided to remove the project time and place this resource into prisons, but safeguard the facility time – this is appreciated. We have decided, for continuity reasons, the facility time which equates to 1.5 FTE will be allocated as follows,

Andrea	-	100% facility time
Carl	-	50% facility time / 50% prisons
Mitch	-	100% prisons

The 8 hours per week on Health, Safety and Fire will also be withdrawn for the period of the crisis.

During what is ramping up to be a very busy period for the PGA, we will have less resource, so we will have to be quite smart in what we do. Can all contact with the PGA go through James initially (james.bryant01@justice.gov.uk) as he may be able to answer some of your queries, reducing the workload for predominantly me along with Carl. I am conscious that our NEC will be working flat out in prisons, so their ability to respond for the PGA will be limited too. Your understanding and tolerance will be appreciated.

Out of Date Control & Restraint.

The above does not preclude you from frontline duties when deployed in a prison, particularly during this period where prisons will be operating under very controlled conditions. You, in law, have the right to use reasonable force to protect yourself.

HMPPS are intending to use the NTRG resource to deliver C & R refresher at pace. It may be worthwhile asking your local prison's C & R Coordinator how you access this in preparation for returning to a prison environment if you wish to.

Testing of Staff & Prisoners for Coronavirus

It is important to note that the testing policy does not belong to HMPPS, but follows the guidance from NHS/Public Health. Mild cases will not routinely be tested as it is no longer necessary to identify all cases of the virus. This national policy also applies to prisons. I know we all feel it should be routine in prisons due to our closed, confined and unique environment, but it will not be the case as it stands now.

Personal Protective Equipment

We have been inundated with emails and phone calls from you regarding PPE and its lack of availability. You have also questioned the policy of only providing PPE when there is a suspected case of COVID-19, considering we are not routinely testing for the virus to understand the true extent of infection amongst the population – feels like shutting the gate when the horse has bolted. We have escalated your concerns and Phil Copple is aware. There is a European shortage of the equipment we need, understandably, and getting supply chains in place is proving difficult, but there is huge focus on improving the current situation. I know this is not helpful when you are asking staff to work in such an environment, but we will continue to pursue your concerns.

Prison Performance and Assurance

We raised the issue of performance during the crisis with Phil Copple early this week. He has a very pragmatic approach to performance. His absolute priorities are Meals, Medication, Prisoner Safety and Welfare, Family Contact and preventing disorder in prisons over the coming months. This is what he wants Governors and their teams to be totally focused on. We believe some direction will come from Ian Blakeman around this issue including suspension of the usual prison performance tool for 2021.

Staffing Levels and Deployment of HQ Staff

We understand that staffing levels are beginning to reduce in some prisons along with regimes as self-isolation kicks in. The list of available staff, both operational and non-operational in HQ, has been collated and should be deployed to you in the coming days.

Defensible Decision Logs

These are unprecedented times and you will be making decisions which impact on the life of staff and prisoners in your care. We cannot overemphasise keeping defensible decision logs when in this situation to safeguard yourself from any future scrutiny of you and your prison.

Financial Reward to PGA Members

There will be financial rewards for our members during the virus crisis. We have a meeting tomorrow to discuss this further and when we reach an agreed position we will send out a further bulletin.

Regards

Andrea

Andrea Albutt
President